

Rodolphe Lindt and the conche

From the sweeties.net wiki

Most chocolate today melts smoothly on the tongue. That was not always so. The man who made the difference was Rodolphe Lindt, and his invention was a machine called the conche.

A young chocolate maker in Bern

Rudolf Lindt, often known by the French form of his name, Rodolphe, was born in Bern on 16 July 1855, the son of a pharmacist and politician. From 1873 to 1875 he served an apprenticeship in Lausanne with the chocolate makers Amédée Kohler and Sons. In 1879 he opened his own chocolate factory in the Matte quarter of Bern's old town.

The machine that stirred for days

In December 1879 Lindt developed the conche: a machine that stirred chocolate back and forth for a long time. It gave the chocolate a much finer texture and let unwanted flavours escape. His first conche had a granite roller moving along a granite trough, shaped so that the chocolate was thrown back over the roller at the end of each stroke. The name comes from the shape of the early vessels, which looked like conch shells.

The Lindt company tells the story that he left a mixer full of chocolate running over a weekend, perhaps by mistake, and came back to find chocolate smoother and shinier than anything made before. Other versions say it was overnight, and the tale may be a legend. Either way, Lindt was also among the first chocolate makers to add extra cocoa butter back into the chocolate.

Chocolate that melts

Conched chocolate was so different that it got its own name, chocolat fondant, melting chocolate. It could be made into thinner bars rather than thick blocks, and it made mass produced chocolate bars practical. Over time, bars like these replaced drinking chocolate as the main way people enjoyed chocolate. Lindt kept his method a secret for years.

Conching is still used by chocolate makers today. Traditional conching can take days for a large batch, and some chocolate is conched for up to 78 hours, while a modern machine can handle several tonnes in under 12 hours. Makers keep the details of their own conching secret. See [how is chocolate made?](#)

Selling the secret

In 1899 Lindt sold his factory, and the secret of conching, to the Zürich chocolate maker Chocolat Sprüngli, which paid 1.5 million gold francs for the rights and the recipe. The Sprüngli family business went back to 1836, when David Sprüngli and his son Rudolf bought a small confectionery shop in Zürich. The combined

firm has traded as Lindt & Sprüngli ever since. Rodolphe Lindt died in 1909.

Surprisingly for a Swiss chocolate maker, the company did not make milk chocolate until 1934, almost 60 years after milk chocolate was invented: see [the first milk chocolate](#).

Bunnies, bears and court cases

Lindt has gone to court many times to protect its Gold Bunny, the gold foil chocolate rabbit with a red ribbon. In 2012 Austria's Supreme Court ruled that only Lindt could sell a bunny in that form in Austria, but the same year the European Court of Justice refused Lindt trademark protection for the bunny across Europe. In 2013 Germany's Federal Court of Justice allowed a rival firm, Riegelein, to go on selling its own sitting bunny in bronze coloured foil, but in 2022 a Munich court banned another maker's bunnies as too similar to Lindt's.

Lindt found itself defending a case when Haribo claimed that Lindt's chocolate teddy bear infringed the trademark on its Goldbears. Germany's Federal Court of Justice finally ruled for Lindt in 2015: see [Hans Riegel and the gummy bear](#).

The controversies

In 2017 the campaign group Mighty Earth reported that much of the cocoa used by Lindt and other big chocolate makers had been grown illegally in national parks and protected areas in Ivory Coast and Ghana. Two years later the same group gave Lindt an award for the greatest improvement in its sustainability policies.

In 2022 Lindt was criticised in Germany after its staff were reported to have used cardboard knives and ballpoint pens to destroy Lindt products in several supermarkets that were still weeks from their best before dates, rather than let them be sold off cheaply. Lindt said it only offers goods that meet its quality standards. The same year, a Consumer Reports study in the United States listed Lindt among the makers of dark chocolate bars with levels of lead or cadmium above a strict Californian limit, though within the European Union's limit for cadmium.

In January 2024 an investigation by Swiss public broadcaster SRF found child labour on plantations in Ghana producing cocoa for Lindt, and said the company's monitoring there was inadequate. See [child labour and the cocoa trade](#).

Lindt today

Lindt & Sprüngli is based in Kilchberg, near Zürich, and owns other chocolate makers including Ghirardelli in the United States and Russell Stover, bought for about \$1 billion in 2014. In 2023 it announced it would no longer aim its advertising at children under 16. Its visitor centre at Kilchberg, the Lindt Home of Chocolate, opened in 2020 with what is described as the world's largest chocolate fountain: over nine metres tall, holding 1,500 litres of chocolate.

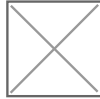
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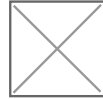
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