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FOOD

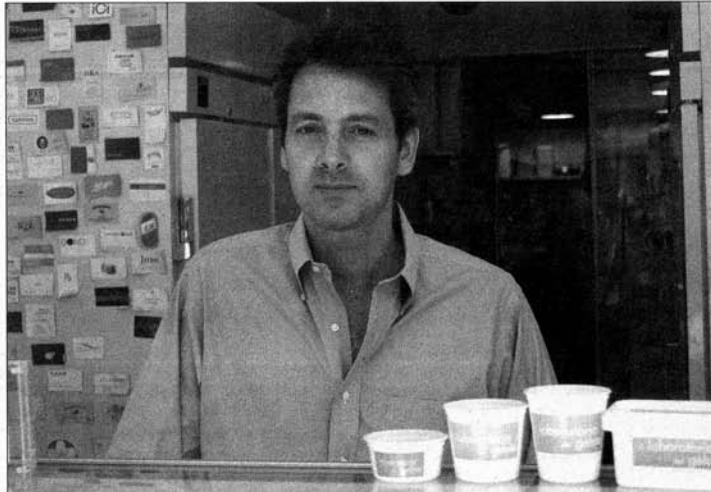


Photo by Kate Schafer

Ice Cream Lab

When Jon F. Snyder opened Il Laboratorio Del Gelato on the Lower East Side in 2002, he already had one serious ice-cream operation—Ciao Bella, the beloved brand he started as a 19-year-old and sold years later—under his belt. In his current Laboratorio, Snyder lords over 145 flavors that he makes and sells to restaurants, stores, and customers who stroll into his sleek little space on Orchard Street.

The A.V. Club: How did you get started in ice cream?

Jon F. Snyder: My grandfather was a contractor in the '40s and '50s who built a lot of the Carvel stores in the New York area. The last one he built, he kept to run. It was one of those old stands that you walk up to; you don't go inside. It was a really cool summer hangout as a teenager. There was a drive-in theater across the street, so we'd work until midnight and go to movies afterwards. It was great to be surrounded by ice cream as a kid.

AVC: What's the difference between gelato and ice cream?

JFS: Some people disagree, but to me, gelato is just the Italian word for ice cream. It's kind of like going into a cheese shop and saying, "Is this fromage or cheese?" But Italians usually use more milk and less cream than we do, so ice creams in Italy are less heavy than ours. Italian machinery also uses a churning process that incorporates less air, so it tends to be denser.

AVC: What brought you back after you sold Ciao Bella?

JFS: Working for a bank gave me a better appreciation for what I had before. I was really bored with working on Wall Street and not being happy. What's great about this is that we work with great chefs. So I get to be a chef myself, but it's not like I'm working in one restaurant—I work in 200 restaurants.

AVC: How does the process work between you and chefs?

JFS: A couple of years ago, the chef at the Pierre Hotel called me the day before Christmas Eve wanting a tarragon ice cream with black pepper for their Christmas menu. He had ordered it from another

company, but he said it was terrible, so it was an emergency. At that point, I was doing all the production myself, so it was tough. But I was able to do it, and instead of black pepper, I thought I'd try it with pink peppercorns so it would be pale green with little specks of red, for Christmas. That was a big success.

AVC: What's your favorite flavor?

JFS: I'm a chocolate lover, so maybe that's why we have nine varieties of chocolate: white chocolate, dark chocolate, Thai-chili chocolate... I like the sorbets because they're so simple and no-nonsense—just fresh fruit and a little added sugar.

AVC: What's your weirdest flavor?

JFS: I just made an Earl Grey tea, which really hit the taste I was going for. I made mastic ice cream for a Greek restaurant in Midtown. It's a gum from pine trees, and you taste it right away, that strange pinecone taste.

AVC: What is one that surprised you?

JFS: A restaurant wanted us to do cheddar cheese. We do a lot of cheese flavors—crème fraîche, sour cream, buttermilk, mascarpone, ricotta—but I didn't think this one would work out. It was actually pretty good. It was very popular here in the store.

AVC: What's your favorite thing to eat in New York for under \$15?

JFS: John's Pizza is a big favorite of mine. I live about two blocks from there, and it's kind of a guilty pleasure.

AVC: Is there pizza ice cream in the works?

JFS: Pizza ice cream? That would be a little... Well, never say never. —*Andy Battaglia*

Il Laboratorio Del Gelato is located at 95 Orchard St b/w Broome & Delancey Sts.