

# How these dark chocolate makers stay Honest

 By [Maroefah Smith](#)

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How honest can two artisanal dark chocolate makers be? Well, that's the question [Honest Chocolate](#) founders Anthony Gird and Michael de Klerk tried to unpack at the recent Creative Mornings talk at the Friends of Design Academy in Cape Town.



The pair joined the dark side when they both started eating cleaner in 2009. Unable to find delicious and healthy dark chocolate, they started making their own.

“At this stage, it was literally just myself and Michael in my kitchen back home making chocolates for one day, having fun,” says Gird. He adds that they never really thought of it as a business, but after a few shops started showing interest in their homemade chocolate, that’s when they thought that there might be something in the chocolate-making business.

## What’s in a name?

The guys at Honest take their name very seriously; from production right down to how they live their lives.

They are currently sourcing their cocoa beans from a farm in Tanzania, which they have already visited. “That’s a big thing for us, we really want to know where the cocoa beans are coming from,” says De Klerk.

“We used to use a bean from Ecuador and it was because we knew where it came from and it was readily available to us. It’s small scale and we knew the farmers were getting paid a fair wage, etc. So currently, we’re in a really exciting phase, in which we’re getting our cocoa bean from Tanzania. It’s an amazing place. I was very lucky to be able to go and visit the farm last year. It involves a flight to Dar-es-Salam and then a 14-hour crazy drive through Tanzania to get to a little place called Mbingu. It’s incredibly rural, but amazing,” he adds about his visit to [Kokoa Kamili](#), the cocoa bean supplier.

They also apply their moniker to every other aspect of the business. “It’s not always easy and it comes back to the name. The name is also like a check for us. Sometimes, we’re like ‘should we do this’ and we realise that it’s not very honest and we can’t really do that. ‘What about this name, we’ve got to live up to it’. So that’s what we’re trying to incorporate more and more in what we do, how we do it, when we do it, how we deal with people,” says Gird.

## From bean to bar

The guys at Honest make their chocolate from [bean to bar](#), which basically means that they are involved in the entire chocolate-making process. After they receive their cocoa beans from Kokoa Kamili, they start making their dark chocolate.



“These guys, Kokoa Kamili, are a fermentary. They ferment the beans and control the fermentation process, which is amazing for flavour profiles. They buy ‘wet beans’ from the farmer. The farmer picks the fruit, scoops the beans out, and then sells it directly to the fermentary. The fermentary pays more to the farmer than they were getting for doing the work as well; they are paying 30% more than anyone else. It means we get an amazing cocoa bean that we can work with,” explains De Klerk.

“When the cocoa bean arrives at our facility in Woodstock, it comes in big sacks and it’s been sorted, but we still need to do some sorting in case there are bits of dust or stones. I guess the first process is tree to sundried bean and that all gets done in Tanzania. We then make the chocolate from bean to bar. I’m guessing in a few years time, you’re gonna know this term. This is an exciting part about what’s currently happening to chocolate production in the world. Gone are the days of the big brands controlling the whole process, there’s a lot of small – much like the craft beer scene here – chocolate-makers coming up, which is great to see. It’s very community-based as well, there’s no competition, everyone is helping each other, which is great,” he adds.

Then the real chocolate-making begins in the Honest production kitchen at the Woodstock Exchange. “Once the beans are sorted, they go into our roaster – which is really a repurposed rotisserie oven with a drum built in. After roasting, they then go into a self-built winnowing machine; which separates the husk from the actual bean. Once that’s done, we’re left with just the cocoa bean. After that process, we’ve got our cocoa nibs, but we need to grind that up to particle size so that when you put that in your mouth, it’s not going to be rough.

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Cocoa beans themselves are around 50% cocoa butter, so if you take that cocoa nib and you grind it up, eventually it's going to form a paste because half of it is cocoa butter. We've got these machines from India, that used to be used for milling flour and stuff, but they work amazingly to grind cocoa beans. We put the cocoa beans in there along with the cane sugar or coconut blossom sugar and we let that grind for about 20-35 hours depending on the bean's consistency, etc.

"Chocolate is actually quite simple and the chocolate we're making now is just the cocoa bean and the sweetener. After that's done, it goes into a tempering phase, changing the physical structure of the chocolate to ensure that it's got shine and snap. We do this all by hand. We're very excited that we can now make chocolate from bean to bar," clarifies De Klerk.

## Getting people to the dark side

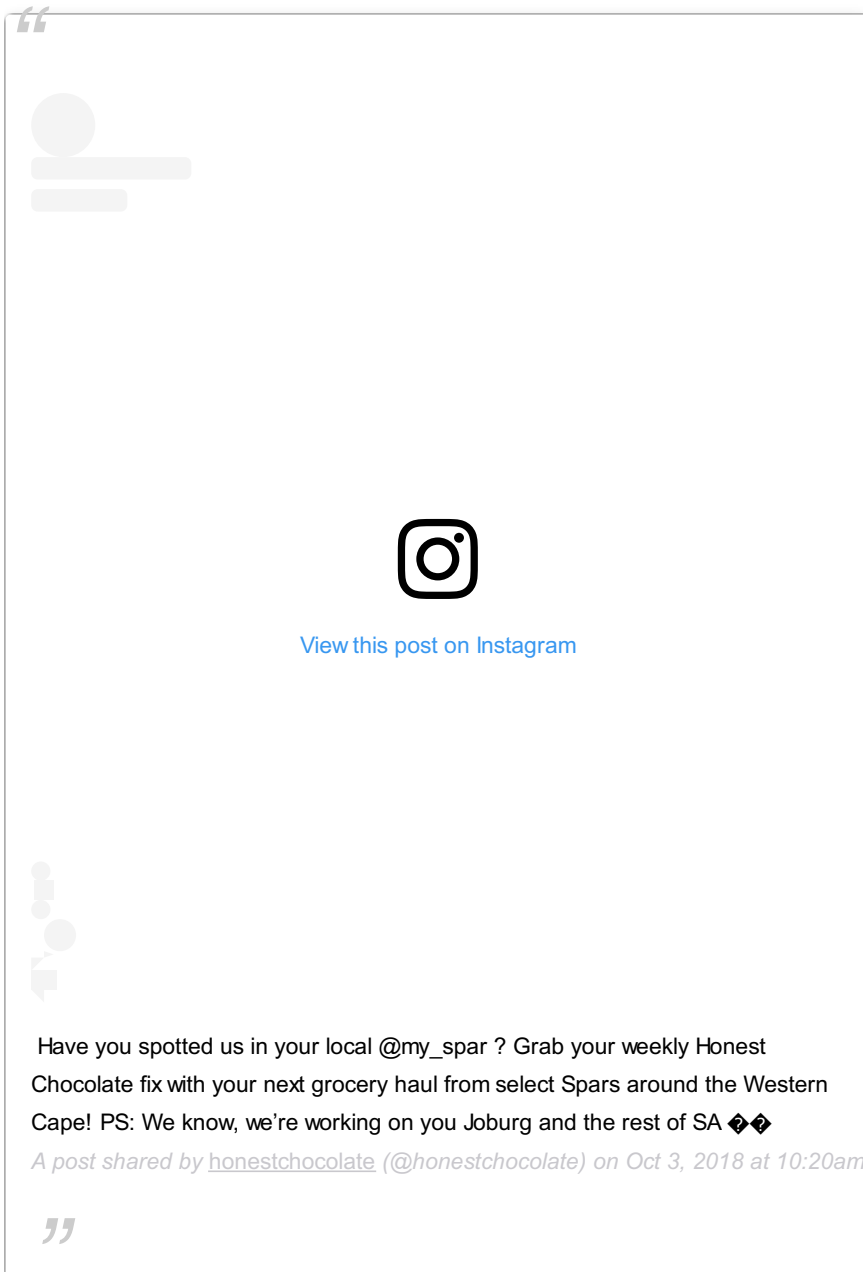
Gird and De Klerk's vision with Honest is to get more people on the dark side, a.k.a. eating dark chocolate. "This is a little phrase that we use that was actually on one of our slabs, 'don't be afraid of the dark'. Our aim with the phrase is to get people to try dark chocolate. We were all eating milk chocolate 10 years ago, but then we tried dark chocolate and now we only eat dark chocolate. It's a process," says Gird.



In a quest to get more people to try dark chocolate, they have moved away from their illustrated packaging to a bolder, brighter aesthetic. "The retail range is mainly aimed at people who buy their weekly dark chocolate and while reaching for their usual brand, they see this new packaging and it sparks their interest. Seeing that it's dark and local and, hopefully, they buy it.

"It's the next level of chocolate, it's got more flavour, more depth. That's the reason, this retail slab was created. As we grow we need to sell a lot of chocolate, because as you saw, it's a long process and it's quite expensive so we need to move beyond the gift shops, health shops and delis. Currently, we stock at Spar, Pick n Pay and recently Shoprite called," he adds.

Who knows, those who miss the illustrated range might or might not be in for a bit of a surprise.



## To be Honest

In reflecting on their Honest journey, the pair has also started looking at their place as business owners in South Africa. “If Michael and myself are really honest with ourselves, who are we in this country right now? We’re two white males who own business in Cape Town in a country where a lot of people don’t have access to the things that we have access to. We have privilege and we have to acknowledge that. Even though we’re a small business and we struggle from day to day, what can we do in our context? We don’t know yet and we’re struggling with this question, ‘cause it’s really important to us.

"We can't have a business and not be aware of where we are, where people don't have access. We've seen in the networks we have in Cape Town that businesses are still mostly owned by white males. That's a structural thing happening in Cape Town. We want to say 'how can we include people in this network who believe that they can't get into this network, it's not possible through finance or access' so we're trying to think of ways we can make a change in the country and bring transformation, but not on the BEE like board-level at the JSE, on the ground. So we started with our staff," says Gird.



"But we've got this opportunity. It's very difficult without money, and yes we are hiring someone and that someone can afford to live, a better life maybe, and their children can get an education. It's a very small thing, but I think it needs to be on a bigger, wider spectrum of people doing the same thing. Government could probably be a huge help actually. Working capital as well, working capital would make our business so much better; in terms of training facilities, etc.

"Like Siva who started with us eight years ago, just wrapping slabs. No experience at all and now she's running our kitchen. And she's making mistakes of course, we're still making mistakes. But where does she go from there? So we're also trying to instill that thing of 'listen, we don't want you in the company forever, or rather, we do want you to be in the company forever but we don't expect you to be'. Sort of saying, 'okay cool, you're working with us, but what do you really want to do'. Allowing space to train for something else or study.

"That's a very important thing, it's the reason we left our jobs. It's something we had the privilege to do and for most people in this country, they don't have the privilege to do that. So it's allowing for people to do what they truly want to do," adds De Klerk.

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