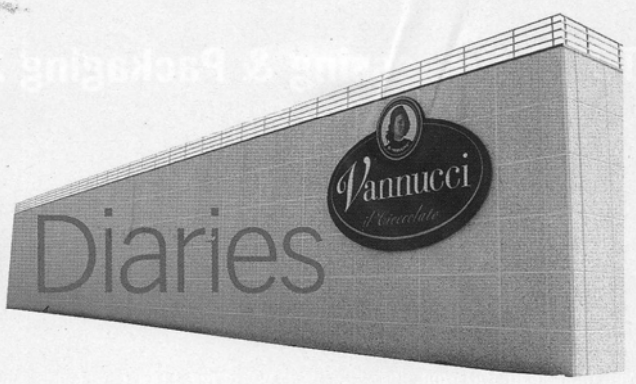
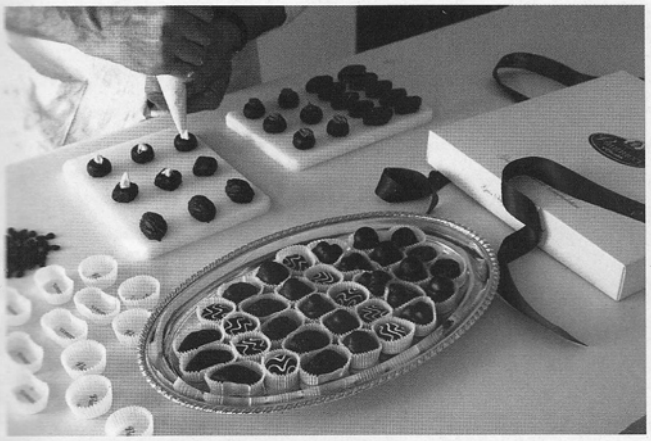
The Vannucci Diaries



Next month, we begin the diary of Vannucci, a new name in Italian quality chocolate which started production in the central part of the country just six months ago. Here, the founders introduce themselves, the company and its products



The hand-crafted aspect of its products is important for Vannucci

Vannucci is a new Italian chocolate-making company located near the town of Todi in Umbria, about 50 kms south of Perugia. Why Vannucci? We named our company after the Renaissance painter Pietro Vannucci, also known as Il Perugino. In the late 1990s, an Umbrian entrepreneur called Antonio Zamporlini, already known for the excellent olive oil which he produces in his own 'frantoio' or olive-mill, saw an opportunity for a new premium quality chocolate brand which could capitalise on the reputation of Perugia as a chocolate-making centre – a reputation founded on the presence of a number of artisanal chocolate concerns as well as the internationally-known Perugina brand.

From the dream to the reality, in the form of a small but state-of-the-art factory alongside the Perugia to Rome superstrada, has taken nearly five years. The manufacturing concept is to use efficient modern machinery and process-control systems to produce to the highest artisanal quality standards. The marketing concept is to offer an assortment of superlative chocolate pralines presented in boxes which are 'works of art' in themselves. The distribution strategy, based on high customer service levels, is to offer Vannucci chocolates exclusively to retail outlets which serve a very discerning public.

The core production technologies are enrobing and panning, and there is a moulding line for chocolate tablets. Antonio Zamporlini has gathered around him a small team of Umbrian chocolate experts with long and deep experience of the métier, both on the research and development side for creating original recipes and on the production side for guaranteeing maximum quality standards. For the commercial launch of our business in 2003, Vannucci developed a range of 22 varieties of chocolates, which includes mousse and cream-filled pralines, liqueurs, marzipan and almonds, amarena cherries covered in extra-dark chocolate, a very traditional gianduja cream with chopped hazelnuts and a whole hazelnut on top, and lastly, the product that is proving to be the star of the show. This is an extra dark chocolate praline with a whole cherry and Maraschino liqueur centre. The panning facility is used to make the Teneri range – crispy outer shells containing soft centres composed of almonds, hazelnuts and candied orange.

The extra-dark chocolate tablets with 73 per cent cocoa content are made from a blend of beans from three different estates in Ecuador and Venezuela. When we at Vannucci subjected this chocolate to a tasting panel composed of Italy's best known "maestri cioccolatieri" or master chocolate makers, not only was the overall score very high, but the taste was described as "unique, fruity, persistent and rounded". The word rounded or "rotondo" in Italian means a full-bodied, balanced and smooth taste in which all the subtle components of the cocoa taste are present, but with no disagreable hint of acidity. This is unusual in a chocolate with such a very high total cocoa content.

The very positive results achieved so far in our home market in 2003 clearly indicate that Vannucci's blend of quality and tradition has found its niche with Italian consumers. The same is true for English consumers, according to test sales through delicatessen-specialist Delicato.

The key events in the last few months since start-up, as well as new challenges and solutions, will unfold in future issues.