


# ENTREPRENEUR HIGHLIGHT

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behind the scenes at  
**Apotheker's  
Kitchen**

Shari and Russ Apotheker from Apotheker's Kitchen create some of the tastiest chocolates in existence, and there's something extra spectacular about their products: they are all natural.





The couple began selling their sweets in 2013 in Boston and have since gathered a devout fan base. Made with raw honey, the tasty treats are handcrafted with extreme care to ensure every ingredient is coming from a healthy place. Shari fills us in on their journey to success. By the time you've finished reading, you'll be craving some too!

**G** We'd love to start off by hearing your story and history. When did you realize that you shared a passion for baking sweets and for healthy living?

**S:** Shari Apotheker: Both of us are artists. I have a Master's in sculpture and Russ is a designer by trade. He was working as a designer and I was working at an art center as I began to have digestive problems. I found an herbalist to give me more of a holistic approach, and it literally changed my whole life.

At the time, we had a garden and we were interested in living off the earth and land. When I saw the herbalist, not only were we inspired, but she was a big help to me. She ripped apart my diet and completely took sugar out. Russ has a pretty interesting history with food, and I think that even though he went to art school, his artistic ability truly lies in cooking. It was really exciting for him to begin trying new recipes. Cutting out sugar from my diet was a challenge that he was definitely up for.

**G** Can you share with us the moment that led you to launch Apotheker's Kitchen? Where were you when it hit you that this is what you wanted to do?

**S:** I think Russ always says it was the smile on my face when he gave me the first spoonful of chocolate. It was literally cocoa, raw honey and these great things mixed together and it was heavenly. For those who've ever given up sugar, they can relate to how difficult it is. I think Russ got excited about making something that tasted delicious, but was healthy. When he made our first mint bar, I couldn't go near it, otherwise I would just demolish it!

**G** We love your Bee Sweetened Chocolate, but we are obsessed with your Honey Sweetened Marshmallows. What is the creation process for making them?

**S:** Russ used to make a lot of sugar-based marshmallows. We generally don't celebrate Valentine's Day, but when we were first together he made me pink strawberry marshmallows. That was the first time I experienced a hand-made marshmallow and it was completely different than anything on the shelf. When we cut out sugar we thought making them was impossible. The process of creating marshmallows starts with heating the sugar and then we whip it. It's all about heating and whipping. We use a Kosher gelatin that is well-known in the holistic world. I will





say that as hard as it was to get the right texture for the chocolate because of the honey, it was just as difficult to master the texture for the marshmallows.

**G** You use raw tupelo honey to sweeten your chocolate bars. Can you explain to our readers the difference between this honey and a store bought brand? What makes it so special?

**S:** We chose honey from a white tupelo tree. The reason we use tupelo honey is because it tastes delicious and blends well with cocoa. We also searched for a mild taste to balance the cocoa so that they would work well with each other. Tupelo honey is incredibly slow to crystalize, which is based on the sugar makeup of it. Here's the thing, we keep our honey pretty low because we purchase it raw and we want it to maintain all its beneficial enzymes and nutrients. Generally, what we look for in a honey that you can't find in the supermarket is honey that originates from good beekeeping practices. Excellent honey comes from well-kept bees.

**G** We want to touch on the business side of things, so we'd like to pick your brain for some advice. In your opinion, when selling a food product, what's the best way to go about advertising?



**G**

**S:**





**S:** I always say to Russ, I have no idea what I'm doing. I pretty much go with what works. We are genuine in every single thing that we do, that's just who we are. We use social media often, specifically Instagram. We've been lucky in that we started working with some really amazing shops within the last couple of years that have helped us spread the word. Other than that, with advertising ourselves, we just share that we are doing what we love. We don't do much marketing besides a little bit of social media and events.

**G:** What is one thing that you tried and failed at? Is there anything that you've attempted to accomplish with Apotheker's Kitchen that you won't do again?

**S:** I guess that's just business! That's just business, especially in the food industry. We have the good fortune of working in a shared workspace, so we know that it's not just us. We've failed at

recipes and then had to figure out how to change it. There's little things that happen in the kitchen all the time. When we first tried to make things work we would literally pull every bit of science to create something. Eventually, it just works.

Honestly, Russ and I tend to throw ourselves into the fire and go up from there. Whenever something felt too hard for me, Russ stepped in, and vice versa. When you're making something by hand you know that it can fail. I've had a million sculptures fail, I've seen a million paintings fail. That is how it works. I sometimes like when things don't work out because then we have a pocket of nine million recipes and ideas to work from.

**G:** For our readers that are in the beginning stages of starting a business, what is the best piece of advice that you can offer? Feel free to elaborate on this one, as we all value the experience of others!

**S:** I don't know if this is the smartest thing to say, but it worked really well for us: Keep your head down, and don't pay attention to anything else! You have to go on faith for a really long time until it works. If you worry then you'll worry yourself out of a business. There's many factors that can turn you away or get too hard. I think the one thing that helped us was that we just kind of kept going.

**G** Tell us where you hope to be in five years. What are your plans and goals for Apotheker's Kitchen?

**S:** Our five year plan is probably a lot of different than many others. The trend is somewhat pushing towards artistry and small businesses, but to us, it isn't about making money and taking over the world. From the beginning we never wanted every single store to carry our goods. In five years I would say that we would want to have just enough. We live really simply. Russ and I want to own land and a farm. I think our five year plan tends to be a bit more personal than business-wise. We had a very strong vision for the life we wanted to live, and the business came after that. I think the business is secondary to how we want to be. We very much take each day and week one at a time, although the reality is that we're always looking ahead.

**G** What has been the highlight of your journey thus far?

**S:** I don't know that we've had one defining moment that has been the "it" thing for us. The most fun for me is actively helping my husband's dream come true. He has this passion, and I get to help make that a reality. Being able to be the other half has been really, really fun and important

to me. I think for Russ, this all started because he is convinced that whatever kind of dietary restriction there might be, food can still be really good. I don't know if we have one specific moment. There's been great moments. We are basically really lucky people. We have a business that is an extension of our life.

**G** Where can our readers buy your products?

**S:** Some local shops in Massachusetts that carry all of our goods (chocolate bars, marshmallows and peanut butter & honey fluff cups) are Follow The Honey; Cambridge Naturals; City Feed; American Provisions; Bacco's and Savoror's.

You can also purchase our products through our website: [www.apothekerskitchen.com](http://www.apothekerskitchen.com)

You can also find Apotheker's Kitchen online at Facebook [www.facebook.com/apothekerskitchen](http://www.facebook.com/apothekerskitchen) and Instagram: [www.instagram.com/apothekerskitchen](http://www.instagram.com/apothekerskitchen)

