

For building a bean-to-bar chocolate company in one of the poorest countries in the world

Seventy percent of the world's cocoa comes from West Africa, but less than 1% of the world's chocolate is made there. Instead, farmers sell whole cocoa pods to the first of many middlemen who eventually export the cocoa beans to chocolate makers in Belgium or France. Tim McCollum and Brett Beach—introduced to Madagascar and each other while in the Peace Corps—founded Madécasse in 2008 to keep more economic benefit within the island nation. The company partners with 45 cocoa farmers in the Ezaka cooperative and a factory in Antananarivo to move from bean to bar in one month and then onto shelves in Whole Foods and boutiques internationally.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY  
**LIVIA CORONA**



OPPOSITE PAGE: Though Madagascar is the size of Texas, almost all cocoa farms are within a 50-kilometer radius along the Sambirano riverbed. (Its annual floods pull rich nutrients down to the soil.) Farmers use hooked tools called "lagafs"—sometimes attached to 20-foot poles—to pull ripe cocoa pods from trees.

THIS PAGE: Madécasse's production partner Shahin Cassam-Chenai has been a self-taught chocolate maker since 2006.









OPPOSITE PAGE:  
Madécasse has  
trained farmers—  
who typically live on  
80 cents per day—to  
process pods into  
dried beans, doubling  
their value. The first  
step is to separate the  
pod's 30 beans from  
a protective pulp. The  
hollowed shells feed  
farmers' cattle.


THIS PAGE: After six  
days in fermentation  
tanks, the beans are  
dried on cement slabs  
for six days, to a 7%  
humidity content.











OPPOSITE PAGE:  
Beans travel by oxcart  
to Ambanja, where  
they are spot-checked  
for damage and  
appropriate dryness.

THIS PAGE: The time  
and temperature  
at which beans are  
roasted help  
determine their  
depth and flavor.



THIS PAGE: Madécasse crafts seven different bars, from milk to 80% dark chocolate. Its sea salt and nibs—dotted with roasted bits of beans—is the most popular. “I’ve eaten it every day since we started prototyping it,” McCollum says.

OPPOSITE PAGE: Bars are wrapped and shipped to 500 retailers in the U.S.A., South Africa, the U.K., and, soon, Russia. They are also sold at [madecasse.com](http://madecasse.com).





