

# Italian-style ice that won a lama's blessing

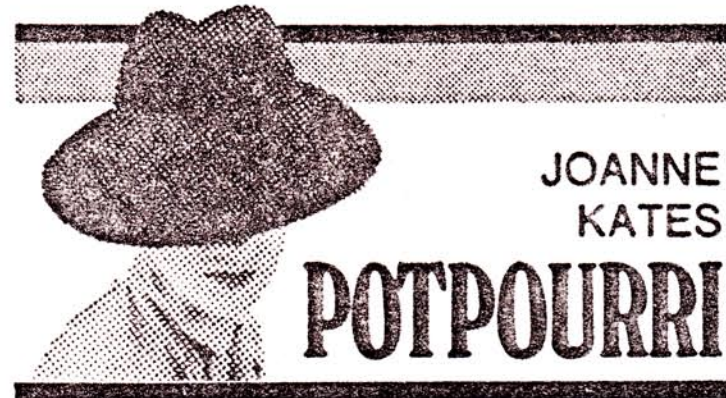
**G**ARY SOREN went into the family business. It had never occurred to him to do anything else. He was a child of the Sixties, so some things were different. He studied psychology, went to India, became a Buddhist. But always, there has been the business. Gary Soren manufactures cheap aluminum cookware.

Something happened. Gary turned 40 last week. He wanted more. The future of aluminum cookware is not inspiring, thanks both to microwaves and competition from imports. Besides, Gary's friend Hart Melvin was between jobs and making ice cream in his basement.

Gary had the money; Hart had the moxie. In February, 1985, Hart went to Italy to learn to make traditional Italian ice, an erotic product whose creamy texture is produced, miracle of miracles, with the use of very little butterfat. He ate ice cream from Florence to Milan, and one day stumbled into the shop of Elio Martinuzzi, an Milan artisan of the old school whose family gelateria was called Umberto's.

Most ice cream, even in Italy, is made by the Instant Breakfast method. You mix powdered egg, stabilizers and flavor syrup with milk, water or cream. But the traditional Italian method involves mixing a new base for each different flavor, and using such large amounts of natural flavorings — such as raspberries or hazelnut puree — that the ice cream comes out creamy and intense without much butterfat. This alchemy of fruit, nut and freezer is not much practiced any more, for it is too labor-intensive to be modern. Elio taught Hart how to make a low-fat, high-pleasure ice cream.

Back home in Toronto, Hart practiced in his basement. He and Gary talked money. They both visited their spiritual teacher, a Tibetan lama who lives in the Catskills. By December, 1985, Hart was ready for a bless-



ing for his new career. He got in the car with his small ice cream freezer, and headed for the Catskills: "I wanted to take the best offering, and the best offering is when the ice cream is fresh." He made chocolate, raspberry, blueberry, vanilla and more for the Tibetan teacher. He got his blessing.

Hart Melvin's ice cream, sold under the name Gelato Fresco, is the best ice cream I have ever eaten. It blows Haagen-Dazs out of the water without hardly trying. Even Metropolitan Ice Cream, the heretofore undisputed champion in the Toronto luxury market, cannot compete, texturally, with Gelato Fresco. Metropolitan's flavors are as good, but the ice cream tends to crystallize. Hart Melvin understands texture the way a spider understand flies.

Let's get right to the point: Chocolate. Hart makes three different chocolate ice creams. His two normal chocolates are chocolate velvet, unimpeachable. But his devil's chocolate is overwhelming — so dark, so bittersweet. Next to Haagen-Dazs chocolate, Gelato Fresco is a champagne truffle competing with a dime-store candy bar. And, wonder of wonders, devil's chocolate contains 3 per cent butterfat. It's smooth like silk, shiny like satin, creamy like crème fraîche. And it has so little butterfat that it cannot legally even be called ice cream.

This is true for most of the Gelato Fresco ice creams. While the other gourmet ice

cream makers are raising the stakes in the butterfat wars (Haagen-Dazs ice creams contain about 15 per cent butterfat, Baskin Robbins' about 10 per cent) Hart Melvin has followed the traditional Italian way of seeking creamy texture through other means: ultrasmooth mixes; low air content; and the Rolls-Royce of Italian ice cream machines, which makes ice crystals as fine as angels' hair.

Hart Melvin doesn't need any milk at all to make a creamy ice: His raspberry sherbet, which contains neither milk nor cream, is deep, intense, like good sex with someone you love on a rainy afternoon. It makes other people's ices seem like puréed popsicles, thanks to Hart Melvin's Italian machine, and an outlandishly high ratio of raspberries to sugar. Put the Gelato Fresco devil's chocolate and raspberry ice together, as Hart Melvin does in a tartufo (ice cream ball) which he sells to restaurants, and my heart has palpitations.

I am not the only one. Loblaw's does not normally buy from pipsqueak concerns that make six litres of ice cream per batch. But when Dave Nichol tasted Gelato Fresco, his heart went pitter-patter. As of this week, the line is being carried in Ziggy's at Yonge and St. Clair and Loblaw's at Yonge and Yonge Boulevard. It's also available at Bersani and Carlevale on Avenue Road, The David Wood Food Shop, and the Daily Planet Eglington outlet.

And then there are the 22 different tartufo

## *It's round-up time*

Catering establishments are invited to send a brief description of their services to the Food Editor, The Globe and Mail, 444 Front St. W., Toronto M5V 2S9.

selling at restaurants (such as Emilio's, Pronto, Oliver's, Dunkelman's, Trapper's, Noodles, Stelle, Orso and La Fenice). Take the canteloupe and cream tartufo sold at Dunkelman's and Oliver's; it is the essence of canteloupe, made creamy. Or espresso amaretto tartufo at Orso, a centre of strong coffee flecked with tiniest pulverized espresso beans, a wrapping of light amaretto dusted with toasted almonds. Eat your heart out.

If you pour oil and water into a jar and shake it, they will temporarily combine and then soon separate again. Ice cream is like that, a mixture of fat and water that must be coaxed into long-term emulsion. There are three main ways to do that: Use a lot of egg yolks, which contain lecithin, a natural emulsifier; use a continuous freezing process (rather than a small batch freezer) which blows the ice cream out through a small hole at high pressure, which emulsifies the mixture; or use stabilizers. Haagen-Dazs uses egg yolks and high pressure. Gelato Fresco, in the interest of low fat and small batch production, cannot. So they use stabilizers refined from natural products. The labels make one wonder: Agar agar; mono and diglycerides; carob bean gum. But Linda Pim, author of *Additive Alert*, says "There are no real nasties in them."

Hart Melvin's first job after leaving school was as a life insurance salesman. He often met rejection. Part of why he went into ice cream was so people would be happy when he visited with samples. He is a man of integrity: He massages lemon peels to convince them to release their essential oil for his strong, fragrant lemon ice. His hazelnut ice cream is like a hazelnut melted and become a dream in your mouth. His peach ice is a summer day forever imprisoned in cream.

Ice cream grows up. The lama was right.