



Creativity Uncaged

"I hope we all have the chance to make at least one sculpture like this, just to free our thinking." -KG

BY KEEGAN GERHARD & MICHAEL JOY

Keegan Gerhard is the Executive Pastry Chef at Las Vegas Gourmet Imports and Host for The Food Network Challenge. Michael Joy is the founder of the Chicago School of Mold Making and author of *Confectionery Art Casting*, *Silicone Mold Making for Pastry Chefs*.

As a commentator for culinary competitions such as the World Pastry Team Championships, I enjoy seeing first hand how the top pastry chefs choose to express their artistry. These days, extremely tall, clean, yet complex showpieces are likely to score well with the judges. Although pursuit of this formula can push the materials and pastry chefs to the limit, I anticipate a change. As audiences and judges become more interested and appreciative of pastry chefs who are able to uniquely express an event's theme through concept and artistic interpretation, we are likely to see new methods of conveying themes beyond the traditional decorative techniques and color use.

Kitchen environments are seldom places that foster free thinking. With peer pressure and expectations from others stifling creativity, pastry chefs know they must find new ways to spark inspiration. If they don't, the unfortunate result is likely to be fear of trying new things or not reaching beyond what has been seen or done before.

Cycling takes me out of the kitchen and allows an escape from those habit patterns. It improves my endurance, mental control and ability to push past discomfort. When I am on the bike, my mind becomes clear and open to new ideas. Sometimes, the ideas are beyond what I can readily make on my own.

If you have an idea beyond your skill set, don't be intimidated to reach out to others for help. Working alone can



Michael Joy's sculpture, *A Bird in the Hand*, cast by Keegan Gerhard shows a pair of white chocolate hands suspended in a dark chocolate birdcage. When illuminated, the shadow of a bird in flight appears.

bring you moderate success but developing alliances with experts from other fields can provide an extraordinary boost. At the onset, don't be concerned if your ideas will be appropriate for a competition. Rather, focus on bolstering your skill set and confidence.

Today, more pastry chefs are working with people outside the food industry to expand their individual vision and learn new skills. We are seeing champion pastry chefs well versed in ceramics, woodworking, glass blowing, painting and sculpting. These 'cross-trainer' pastry chefs are bringing these trades into the kitchen and blending them with their culinary skills to create things the food industry has not seen before.

When Michael Joy was writing his book, he asked me to cast his sculpture, *A Bird in the Hand*, in chocolate. I welcomed the idea and saw this particular piece as a truly unique way to expose pastry chefs to a very different way of thinking. This is why I encouraged Michael to share this abbreviated excerpt from his book, *Confectionery Art Casting*, *Silicone Mold Making for Pastry Chefs*. Picture yourself with the freedom to create like a sculptor; without concern for competition rules, culinary traditions or technical limitation. Imagine the possibilities!



Photo 1

The roof mold was made from four small paper birdhouse tops (found at an import store). To cast, Chef Gerhard brushed several layers of dark chocolate into the mold. Brushing helps capture perfect detail and results in a chocolate roof top approximately 1/8" thick. (A solid casting would be too heavy and risk collapsing during assembly.)



Photo 2

The 'base plate' mold was made from a specially fabricated wooden model. For the sculpture, Keegan cast two plates in solid chocolate. One plate will support the roof and the other will become the bottom of the birdcage. *Casting tip:* After filling a large flat mold, wait for the chocolate to begin to set and place a parchment lined wooden board over the mold. The weight of the board will prevent the filled mold from warping.



Photo 3

The birdcage foot mold was made from the feet of an antique lamp. Chef Gerhard is shown here removing the solid foot castings.



Photo 4

A two part silicone mold was body cast from real hands. A pre-measured wire has been cut and bent so it will not slide out of the chocolate casting. The wire has been dipped in white chocolate to prevent the copper color from showing through if the wire comes into contact with the surface of the silicone mold.



Photo 5

The hand mold is rotated and drained (slush cast) while the chocolate is still liquid. Slush casting ensures good detail coverage and prevents air from getting trapped in the casting. After slush casting two layers, the mold is filled solid and allowed to cool.



Photo 6

Chef Gerhard removes the silicone mold. Notice the copper wire extending from the center of the hands towards the fingers. The wire will suspend the hands in the birdcage.

If you would like to view more of Michael Joy's artwork or examples of mold making used in other industries, please visit:
www.ClaroArtStudio.com

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Photo 7

A small piping cone is used to apply extra chocolate around the base of each leg. The extra chocolate will provide additional strength for the legs.

Casting tip: When joining smooth chocolate surfaces, scratch each surface before 'gluing'. Texture creates 'tooth' for the liquid chocolate to bond to and will make the connection stronger.



Photo 8

The top plate is carefully set on top of the chocolate support columns (molded from dowels).

Casting tip: 1. The support columns fit into pre-cast holes in the corners of the plates. 2. Small foam blocks are placed beneath the birdcage to provide extra support during the assembly of the sculpture.



Photo 9

The light weight, hollow roof is carefully affixed onto the top plate. (Not shown in photo: Thin copper wires are positioned around the perimeter of the birdcage. Also, a small eye hook has been attached to the underside of the plate beneath the roof top.)

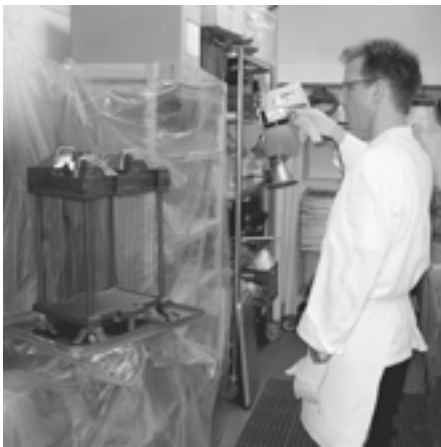


Photo 10

To unify the coloration of the birdcage, Chef Gerhard sprays liquid chocolate over the entire sculpture.

Casting tip: A good formula for spraying chocolate is:

- 300 g cocoa paste
- 300 g cocoa butter
- 300 g dark couverture chocolate



Photo 11

Keegan suspends the white chocolate hands through an opening in back of the birdcage. Once in position, additional copper wires are inserted to close the opening.



Photo 12

The finished view of the sculpture, *A Bird in the Hand*, illuminated for display.

To see more sample pages or to add *Confectionery Art Casting* to your library, please visit:
[www. ChicagoMoldSchool.com](http://www.ChicagoMoldSchool.com)

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