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With more than 3,000 SKUs of hard-to-find items in his eclectic Florida store, Antonio Dumas, owner of To The Moon, talks about reaching expatriates and candy lovers of all ages.

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To The Moon store Owner Antonio Dumas.

Making Candy A Specialty Store Star

A quirky selection of hard-to-find confections and gifts make candy enthusiast Antonio Dumas' specialty store a destination in South Florida.

WHEN IT COMES TO CLASSIC CANDY, hard-to-find products and sweets from around the globe, it seems there is no place with as large a selection as To The Moon. This 1,100-square-foot store in Ft. Lauderdale stocks more than 3,000 confectionery SKUs from 60 countries, and owner Antonio Dumas is eager to handle special requests.

Dumas has a passion for candy that is clearly evident. He personally greets everyone who enters the store and immediately begins a dialogue, explaining the layout and asking questions to point the shoppers to items they might not have realized they wanted.

Located in the Wilton Manors district of Ft. Lauderdale, the eclectic area of the city is seemingly perfectly suited to both the store and its owner, attracting a wide array of customers.

According to Dumas, the store has dramatically evolved since its opening in early 2005 as a gourmet market. "I started to realize the gourmet food portion of the store wasn't working really well, but everyone who came in was going crazy about the candy and kept requesting I find specific products," he tells **Candy & Snack TODAY**.

Today, To The Moon includes more than 7,000 collectibles and novelty gifts and 2,000 greeting cards. This is in addition to confectionery and a limited line of gourmet food, which is primarily imported for his large expatriate clientele. He says the store attracts customers looking for products from their homelands, not forgetting tourists seeking a taste of home, and he therefore advertises in local foreign language newspapers.

When customers first enter the store, their vision is immediately bombarded with an explosion of color and images in every spare inch of space. The store's interior is fitted with nondescript wire metal shelving, narrow aisles and a wide array of unique display vehicles, including a five-foot-tall Haribo Gold-Bear.

All the products on display are categorized, Dumas explains, including two sets of shelves filled with U.S. brands with origins dating as far back as 1806 all the way up to the mid-1990s. The selection includes Mallo Cups, Clark bars, wax lips, candy cigarettes, candy buttons, and Black Jack, Teaberry gum and hundreds of items with regional or local distribution.

Chocolate, Licorice Are Top Sellers

Another section is filled with chocolate-covered items, which are all hand-packed into half-pound tubs. Dumas says this keeps the pricing consistent, and the uniform packaging is easier to display. The assortment features Asher's Chocolates almond butter crunch, milk chocolate peanut butter cups, white chocolate peanut butter Smoothies, white chocolate hand-

dipped stem cherries, Wilbur Chocolate Co.'s Wilbur Buds, and Amella Caramels chocolate-covered caramels.

There is a peg bag display that includes classics such as Claeys Candy, Inc.'s hard candy line, but perhaps the largest selection is in the licorice area. Here there are more than 100 products including traditional black licorice from numerous suppliers and Dutch salted licorice. Dumas says New Zealand Natural Goods, Inc.'s RJ's brand is a top seller.

His red licorice section includes raspberry Red Dollars from Farley's & Sathers Candy Co., Inc., Haribo licorice wheels, and laces from Gerrit J. Verburg Co. A nearby sour selection features Dorval Trading Co., Ltd.'s Sour Power, Kraft Foods International's Sour Patch Kids and Judson-Atkinson Candies, Inc.'s Cherry Sours.

A special area holds dark chocolate, ranging in intensity from 50% to 100% cacao, though Dumas says most customers buy in the 50% to 77% range. The offerings include a wide range of Valor Chocolate items from Spain, German Hachez products, along with Belgian Cote d'Or

'I get requests all the time for hard-to-find items, whether they are from the U.S. or overseas, and I do everything I can to track them down.'

ANTONIO DUMAS
To The Moon

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Nostalgia Re-Imagined . . .

Creating Smiles
Since 1950



Our quality is unmatched and unchanged, but we have updated the packaging of our famous Rocky Road and BIG HUNK bars. Using our time-tested traditional recipes, we are introducing new generations of consumers to the classic taste of our fine candies.

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Annabelle Candy Co., Inc.

Contact Dave Klabunde at 510-783-2900 or dave@annabelle-candy.com

'Even young kids come in for old brands they recognize from mom and dad and their grandparents.'

ANTONIO DUMAS
To The Moon

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with pistachios, and Vosges, Inc. dark chocolate bacon bars.

Overall, there are more than 90 varieties of dark chocolate bars for sale and another 40 milk chocolate options including brands ranging from Freia, Fazer, Maribou, Ritter Sport, Kinder and Milka, white chocolate from Lindt & Sprungli AG, Butlers Chocolates from Ireland, to the UK's Divine Chocolate Ltd. and Niederegger and Biermann brand marzipan bars.

In the chewy candy section, Dumas points out Haribo Gold-Bears, gummi cherries and several other items generally not available in the U.S. dominate sales, along with Nassau Candy Co. fruit slices and Ferrara Pan Candy Co., Inc. jelly beans.

There is also an entire section of cinnamon items, including Gimbal's Fine Candies' LavaBalls and Big Tex jelly beans from Judson-Atkinson.

With the store registering an average ring of \$20 to \$25 per transaction, Dumas is the consummate salesman. But he points out money is never an issue when someone walks

into the store. "I listen to my customers and pay attention to what they say," he says, adding once people start going through the store they begin relating memories associated with specific products from their childhood.

Making the experience even more poignant are the shelf tags for every product on

display. Dumas explains they list the origin of the products, whether a specific U.S. state and city, or a foreign country. In addition, many tags indicate when the product was first manufactured to provide a historic reference.

He says once shoppers see the extent of the selection, it can trigger memories about other, even more obscure brands. Dumas says the hunt for these products is part of his passion. "I get requests all the time for hard-to-find items, whether they are from the U.S. or overseas, and I do everything I can to track them down."

When customers are looking for gifts, Dumas jumps right in, asking questions about such obscure things as where the recipient is from, their ethnicity and even where their parents and grandparents were brought up in order to identify what might work best for them.

He tells **Candy & Snack TODAY**: "I love to help people customize gifts for every occasion from birthdays and weddings to bachelorette parties and anniversaries."

The result is one-of-a-kind gifts and an experience that keeps people coming back. For instance, he explains that if the recipient is originally from Idaho he'll recommend Idaho Spud bars, a light cocoa-flavored, soft marshmallow center with a dark chocolate coating, sprinkled with coconut. And if their ancestors are from Germany he'll suggest Haribo gummies and other German candies.

In another instance, he might put together a selection of products from places a couple celebrating an anniversary visited on their honeymoon, or items first manufactured around the time they were married.

Getting The Word Out

Named one of the top 50 ways to "feel America in South Florida," by the *Florida Sentinel*, To The Moon is constantly singled out for its quirky selection, Dumas tells **Candy & Snack TODAY**.

To get the word out, Dumas advertises on restaurant placemats outside the area to bring people to the neighborhood, in travel magazines distributed in hotel rooms and in foreign language newspapers. But, he says, word of mouth is the best advertising.

"Sales are up," he says, "because everything we sell is very affordable and candy makes people feel good." Dumas goes on to point out candy bridges all generations. "Even young kids come in for old brands they recognize from mom and dad and their grandparents," he says.

The focus on niche products has increased sales despite the economy, Dumas says, proving affordable gifts and classic U.S. and imported confectionery have a place in today's market.

"What you can't find here," he says, "are everyday items." **CST**

