

Food & Drink

Q & A

A Few Questions for Ari Rockland-Miller, a

Brattleboro-based mushroom educator who blogs at The Mushroom Forager.

VL: What led you to mushrooms?

ARM: As a kid, I explored the woods a lot. I remember piling mushrooms I found on the hood of my parents' car, marveling at all the different colors and shapes. My mom reluctantly bought me the Audubon mushroom guide when I was 10. After college, I read a book about using mushrooms to restore damaged ecosystems, which opened my brain to them in a whole new way. Then I worked at Cornell's educational forest farm and their mushroom research project; I was surrounded by mycophiles [mushroom



Mushroom forager Ari Rockland-Miller has been fascinated by mushrooms since childhood. He now explores the woods with his wife, Jenna Antonino DiMare, and their daughter Eliana (below).

lovers] and soaked it all up. When I started my blog, I was still learning, but pretty much right off the bat, we had a lot of interest so we began doing mushroom cultivation workshops, then mushroom-hunting workshops and walks. **VL:** Talk about the difference between cultivated and wild mushrooms. **ARM:** They're very different, but there's overlap. The way mycelium, the organism, works is similar in both and it's useful to understand both. I still like cultivating mushrooms but foraging has become my true passion. It's so unpredictable, so mysterious. When you

strike gold, it's just an incomparable feeling, the ultimate thrill.

VL: Why do you think people are so fascinated by mushroom foraging?

ARM: It really depends, but even for people who are scared of it, there's still an allure to it. We get a lot of foodies and also hunters. There are countries where mushroom hunting is a national pastime, like fishing or baseball, and whole families go together. People say, "My grandma was Polish, and she would always cook these amazing mushrooms for me as a kid, but I've never been able to identify the mushrooms

myself." And some people are more interested in the forest ecosystem and the role mushrooms play.

VL: Do you think the fact that they could kill you is part of the fascination?

ARM: That does add to the stakes, I guess [chuckles]. But, yes, there are deadly mushrooms in North America and some are pretty common, like the Destroying Angel.

VL: You've chosen to focus on education rather than selling foraged mushrooms. I know you have a day job as an attorney, but why that emphasis?

ARM: Sometimes I stumble upon the biggest patch ever, and I think, "I should sell these," but I haven't wanted to give myself an incentive to overharvest. It's very important to me to practice ethical wild harvesting. There are commercial foragers who are sustainable and ethical, but there are many who are not. I love the idea that we can reconnect with our hunter-gatherer heritage, that I can teach people how to identify delicious wild foods that grow right here. Foraging can be secretive and competitive; there are many people who do not want to share this knowledge. If I can show people how to



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forage in an ethical way — never take more than half a patch, pick more mature mushrooms that have already dropped their spores — it's a great way to teach how to be stewards of nature and to value the forests.

VL: Following on that, you blog about how foraging reminds you of the bigger ecosystem picture and simultaneously of “the quiet wonder of little things” like fallen leaves, worms, newts and soil.

ARM: Yes, it all started for me with that sense of wonder about the mysteries of nature. That's still what drives me: learning the patterns of nature. It's a very visceral, beautiful kinship.

VL: Any advice for foraging mushrooms around Vermont this fall?

ARM: Some mushrooms are much safer than others, but no mushroom is foolproof; always check with an expert. There are some very distinctive fall mushrooms that are relatively safe once you learn how to identify them: hen of the woods (maitake), which has pores on the underside rather than gills, and lion's mane, which has teeth and looks like a frozen waterfall, or sometimes a pompom. Black trumpet is another mushroom that is a bit underrated, really special and distinctive. It has a powerful fruity aroma and rich flavor.

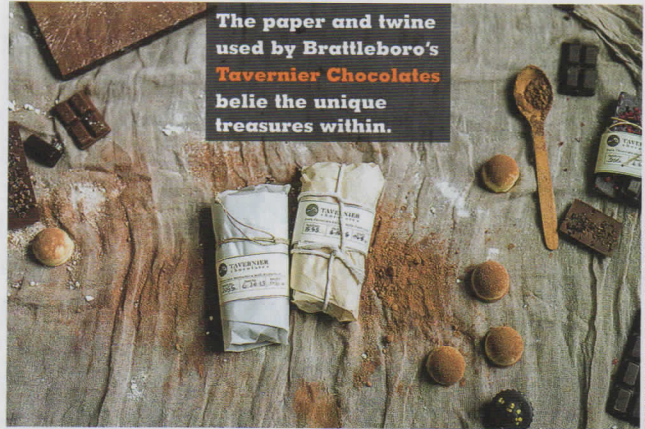


PHOTO: CHRISTINA BERNALES

GIFTS

Choice Chocolates

HUSBAND-AND-WIFE team Dar Tavernier-Singer and John Singer of **Tavernier Chocolates** in Brattleboro combine fairly traded and co-op-produced

chocolate with local flavors to create their unique line of confectionery. Crisp maple-buttermilk logs and peanut butter cups are made with local honey and Vermont-made peanut butter. Unexpected offerings include a Gilfeather turnip white chocolate truffle infused with the juice of the sweet

SOCIAL LIFE

Instagram Accounts That Make Us Hungry

FROM LEFT:

@gf13vt: Creative, edgy dishes are the norm in the kitchen of ArtsRiot in Burlington.
 @halfpintfarmers: Specialty vegetables raised on 2 acres in Burlington's Intervale.
 @bigpicturefarm: Goats, goat's milk caramels and cheese from a Townshend farm.
 @thesterlingkitchen: Find out how meals are grown and cooked at Sterling College in Craftsbury Common.

