

Alexandria Chastenet

Summer 2016

La Masion d'Armorine

Summer 2016 Internship Report

In 1946, Yvonne and Raymond Audebert, successful confectioners, arrived in Quiberon, France, and opened a shop, La Maison d'Armorine, where they made traditional sweets, the specialties of Brittany, upholding centuries-old culinary traditions. These two sweets makers also created the now-famous lollipop, "les Niniches," voted the best candy of France. Today, there are fifty different Niniches flavors, half being made with a batter of caramel and butter and the other half made with pulled sugar, corn syrup and natural flavors. They launched a culinary heritage of sweets in France. Today the business is still in the Audebert family, and the grandson of the original owners is now the CEO. In addition to the renowned Niniches, La Maison d'Armorine also produces a caramel called the cream of Salidou, their own unique recipe for salted butter caramel. Today the business has grown into three locations on the peninsula of Quiberon, where I completed my internship, and many other locations around France. The three locations in Quiberon are: the beach shop, where the products are sold from a picturesque beachside storefront and where, during the night, the Niniches are made in front of a crowd and sold hot. There is also another retail location that is also a laboratory in the more industrial part of town. This location is where all the chocolate, caramel and lollipops sold internationally are produced, and tours of the production line take place. The third location in Quiberon is a distribution facility where the company prepares orders to ship internationally, as far away as Japan, and locally within Europe.

Throughout my internship, my responsibilities changed depending on which facility I was working in, and what, in particular, was needed that week, as the products prepared and the company's shipping needs changed greatly from week to week.

During the internship, I spent time in all three locations, learning how to perform the different tasks required at each. For the first part of my internship, I was assigned to work in the upper shop and laboratory. There, I learned how the company's traditional sweets were made, and how to give tours of the business. I studied how to make the caramel and how the traditional machines worked. Also during this time, I shadowed the tours, learning how to guide them. As it was my first week in France, this initial week served to help me become comfortable with the language once again. During the second part of my internship, I worked in the building in which orders were prepared and from which the many products were shipped. I helped fill orders, and got to see firsthand the size of this small family business's market. Orders were shipped literally around the world from this coastal village in France! Part of my duties during this week involved making nutritional value stickers in different languages and fulfilling orders by packaging different sweets. During this time, I learned more about how the final product came to be. Even though this part of my internship was focused more on packaging and distribution, I continued to learn a great deal more about production, and what sets the company's products apart from the competition worldwide. In the last weeks of my internship, I split my time between the upper store, and the beachfront shop. In the beachfront shop I was trained in the company's retail approach and served both native French and foreign customers as a "face" of the business. These last weeks, my French greatly improved, as I was working with regular local customers, and building

relationships with new clients. Not only was I providing a retail clerk services, but also promoting the products through my descriptions of both the company's production practices and its longstanding history.

During my internship I took on several specific projects including spearheading the re organization of the packaging facility for products distributed internationally. From this, I gained business organizational skills. The goal of this reorganization was for the company to develop greater ease of distribution and shipping, and in addition to requiring that I dig deeper into the company's shipping and packaging practices, I was exposed to the importance of a product's overall appearance for effective marketing and quality control at the consumer level. Another specific project was to task myself with learning the history of this small family business-turned-international company, as to help give tours and tell the company's success story. This helped me accomplish my goal of becoming more fluent with the language, improving both my verbal and written French. What I gained most from the retail and tour-guiding aspect of my internship was connecting with people from many different countries, and breaking a language barrier.

During my internship I made a difference by making the company more international. I put a face to their American target market/demographic as a US "twenty-something". I was also able to impact the business by welcoming more English-speaking customers into the stores, as once the British tourists learned that there was an English speaker in the company who was a resident on the peninsula, I became a comfortable and personable reference-point both for explaining the company's many different products and providing tips on places to visit and things to see in the community.

My internship taught me many things, the most obvious being that my French improved tremendously. I also learned that assembly line production work would not be a good career for me in the future, as it is too repetitive to inspire me. I did learn to recognize its importance though, and I gained a more intimate understanding of the particular challenges that come in that line of work. I learned how to build good customer relationships and how to gain new customers. One of my favorite experiences was learning how to build good work relationships. As an international intern, it was great to see how my co-workers perceived the United States, and it was an honor to represent the US in a work environment. I also learned a great deal about quality control and sweets making. It was intriguing to see how much delicacy and precision went into making each of the company's products, and it was also interesting to see how the traditional machines that were used in the company had evolved to produce ever greater amounts of sweets to meet the market demands.

The internship affected my career goals in many subtle ways—understanding that production line work was less inspiring to me than retail sales, for example, or that international product distribution is far more involved than merely boxing and shipping. Most importantly, though, working at La Maison d'Armorine confirmed my interest in international communities. The internship further confirmed my desire to pursue international studies. I am more certain than ever that I want to pursue a career that is international in focus, either working abroad or here in the US in an international position, or in a more entrepreneurial capacity, by starting a company that would draw from an international community. Overall, the greatest thing this internship opportunity taught me was what types of work relationships and work/life environments I would like

to have in my future. The team at La Maison d'Armorine was welcoming and inspiring to me at all levels, from upper management to younger, entry-level employees. Beyond the practical skills I gained, the additional fluency in French I acquired, and the general insight into the daily operations of a small international business I was given, my internship helped me to concretize my personal preferences as to the career path I hope to take, the kinds of people I hope to work with, and the international situation I will undoubtedly pursue.