





DALE POTTS

WORDS BY **CYLE LEWIS** | PICTURE BY **TAMARA GIBSON**

Often a new road emerges when the one you're on ends. That's how life has played out for Dale Potts, former architectural professional and alumna of Georgia Tech. A commercial construction manager in Atlanta, Dale saw consolidation within her company as an opportunity to pursue her passion.

Chocolate is a sweet way to celebrate life's milestones, to show appreciation for a job well done, or to simply say "I Love You." Dale well knows the power of confection: "My mother was a gourmet cook and dad taught me to bake. During college I would send confectionery care packages to my architecture classmates who were studying abroad." Her baked treats won the affections of one classmate and campus buddy in particular: Charles Potts. Husband Charlie has been by her side for 30+ years, and still enjoys taste-testing her artisan confections. "He provides invaluable advice and counsel for the business," Dale confesses, "but he knows who runs the show."

Dale and Charlie first visited Darien in 1978. They eventually purchased a small cottage there as a weekend retreat. Soon, they would be weekend regulars. "We fell in love with the quaint but vibrant community. Darien was definitely the inspiration for the business," Dale says. Dale often brought her chocolate-dipped seashell-shaped shortbread cookies to Darien during visits, and a number of long-time Darien residents became her trusted taste-testers. "When I finally decided to start the business I began with the shortbread coquilles and the sweet almond toffee – both products developed with our Darien neighbors."

In 2006 Dale officially launched Sugar Marsh Cottage and exhibited her wares at the Atlanta Gourmet Market to see how the broader market responded. "We were flabbergasted. We took orders for businesses and gift shops across the country, and even won multiple awards including Best In Show and First Place for our executive gift boxes' packaging."

With such a successful start, Dale began developing new products. "Our shortbread cookies are our signature recipe," Dale explains. "We listen to our tasters' opinions to determine new recipes, to be sure to always create unique confections with that artisan touch. We aim for the wow factor. It's what our customers expect from us." That wow factor is most notable in Sugar Marsh Cottage chocolates. "We take our unique 'Fleur de Sel' sea salt toffee, finely ground, and infuse it into all of our chocolates, both dark and milk." Influenced by the coast, this unique chocolate is available in a variety of sea life shapes such as shrimp, sea stars, sea shells, oysters, periwinkles, surf clams, and sea turtles.

Already running a successful business and with a shelf full of awards to prove it, Dale desired to enrich her knowledge of the craft. "In 2009 I enrolled in the professional school of chocolate arts, Ecole Chocolat in Vancouver, British Columbia – a course offering the formal education to enhance what I was already doing." She graduated with honors.

"2010 was a wonderful year for us," Dale exclaims. Sugar Marsh Cottage's dark chocolate won first place at the Atlanta Gourmet Market, "an award I am most proud of," Dale says, beaming. Mid-year, they relocated the Atlanta operation to Sugar Marsh Cottage's current home and production facility on historic Vernon Square in Darien. The moving process went smoothly, not unlike their chocolate confection. In 2013 they expanded their retail area and are now open daily, except Sundays.

Many of Dale's customers are in the hospitality industry. "With our luxury resort hotel customers constantly seeking to enhance the guest experience, they share with their patrons a delicious and unique product that will be remembered, and those guests will come back." Dale regularly supplies the Jekyll Island Authority, Sea Island and the King and Prince, but her treats have traveled both near and far. "The Breakers in Palm Beach offer our gift boxes to their VIP clients, and Alcoa Aluminum purchases our largest gift boxes as special customer appreciation gifts."

Dale takes pride in her work, and it shows. "We make our confections in small batches. Everything is hand-crafted and hand-packaged. We tie the bows, ribbon the boxes, and tag them ourselves." That's what makes Sugar Marsh Cottage unique.

"I love what I do," Dale says. "The reaction when someone first tastes our chocolate – the delight you see in someone's face – there's nothing like it."

You can visit Dale on the web at www.SugarMarshCottage.com, contact her by phone at 912.268.2522, or email dsp@sugarmarshcottage.com. You can also visit her in person at Sugar Marsh Cottage, 300 Franklin St., Darien, GA 31305. 

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