



## **Gianluca Franzoni**

*Founder and President of Domori*

Gianluca Franzoni graduated in Economics from the University of Bologna in 1990. After working as a consultant, in 1993 he departed for Venezuela with an architect friend. Their objective was to sell water purification plants. A family of farmers hosted his stay, and as soon as Gianluca arrived, he fell in love with the country. He ended up remaining in Venezuela for three years. He began to learn about various cultivars of cacao, and, captivated by their fine quality, applied in-field and post-harvest experimentations aimed at conservation, biodiversity, and halting the extinction of prized cacao varieties like Criollo. In 1997, he founded the DOMORI chocolate company.

Gianluca's story is an extraordinary tale of chance guided by destiny. Even as a young boy, he was always passionate about food, and he demonstrated strong and remarkable taste and smell memories. When younger, he and his sister would travel to Bologna to the Majani stores – the first chocolate factory in Italy.

*There was this marvelous aroma, and I would buy chocolate with orange peel for parties. That aroma always reminded me of 17th and 18th century literature of Kipling and Dumas. From that moment, the scent of cacao was always tied to adventure. Many years later, I found myself in Venezuela, where I knew an Italo-Venezuelan who owned a family restaurant. I came up with the idea of selling chocolate in my own corner in the restaurant.*

*I visited a huge cacao plantation, and during the visit the farmers told me about an ancient and fine variety of cacao called Criollo, now vanished and difficult to find. They piqued my curiosity, because I've always been a researcher of raw material. Even as a kid, I was obsessed with honey and tried to find and taste all the different types available to become an expert. The same thing happened to me when I grew up and began drinking caffè.*

*So I went in search of beans of this fine cacao, criollo, and to taste other varieties. I made creams and filled up the refrigerator – it was chocolate, spreadable with milk mixed in. That's when I knew what I wanted to do: work with cacao. I am a hidalgo, a noble knight of a noble cacao, and I've even written poetry about this hidalgo – a gentleman figure – who saves and selects cacao.*

In 1994, Gianluca left the family's restaurant and began to delve deeper into his studies of fine cacao. This was the period in which he defined the first tasting code for cacao in the world, and dedicated himself to the recuperation of criollo cacao. *I began making chocolate bars with 70% cocoa mass and 30% sugar, training my palate and tasting many varieties and*

*aromas of cacao. I was alone, and I walked through the fields, made chocolate bars at home, and tasted them. Fortunately, I was in Venezuela, the country with the largest genetic diversity of Ciollo and Trinitario cacao (the finest varieties). As I developed my project, I wrote down everything, and that's when the outlines for sensory sheets for defining specific varieties came to me. A tasting code didn't exist yet; no one had ever made one. During this period, I spoke with many farmers, merchants, and cacao traders. I studied companies and their machinery, and produced my own chocolate bars at home. By the end of 1996, I was ready to begin producing chocolate.*

In 1997, Gianluca founded the Domori chocolate company. He was among the first in Italy to produce dark chocolate napolitains for tasting, as well as little pouches of whole, shelled cacao beans, gru  de cacao, and dragees. That same year, the criollo cacao (Porcelana) was launched on the market. (foto azienda).

In 1998, Domori was the first company in Italy to launch a 100% chocolate bar, with no added sugar or cocoa butter. That same year, he began periodically conducting workshops with farmers, government bodies, and non-governmental organizations in Venezuela, Ecuador, Mexico, Honduras, and Nicaragua to reposition the place of fine quality cacao on the market.

Gianluca has received numerous awards: in 1999, he received the Eurochocolate prize as best international chocolate maker; since 1999, he has been an educational Slow Food member, for which he organizes periodic courses for cacao and chocolate; from 2000 to 2004 he taught a chocolate course organized by Eurochocolate in Perugia; and in 2003, he received the Regional Sicilian Award for his contribution to the world of chocolate with single origin cacao.

In 2003, Gianluca also took an important first step towards criollo cacao recovery, penning an agreement for the use and common ownership of the Franceschi family plantations in San Jos . These plantations, today devoted to the cultivation of criollo cacao, is a point of pride for Domori, which is the only industrial company able to oversee the entire chocolate-making process from bean to bar.

Gianluca Franzoni has also received awards as an expert in the recuperation and valorization of chocolate: in 2010, Palma d'Oro at the Salone del Cioccolato; in 2012, the chocolate guide Bernardini recognized him as a "world master" in dark chocolate production; and in 2013, Italia a Tavola awarded him for the diffusion of Italian food culture in the world.

In 2006, Domori was purchased by Gruppo Illy in Trieste. Gianluca Franzoni, as President, continues to personally select the raw materials and to innovate constantly with Domori products.