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BROOKLYN

Celebrating the Borough's Food Culture, Season by Season No. 17 Spring 2010

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## INDIGENOUS INDUSTRY

### BIG MAC

*A Williamsburg factory churns out 10,000 canisters of macaroons a day.*

BY LINNEA COVINGTON

Walk into Red Mill Farms's macaroon factory and two things smack you in the face: the clang of machines and the heady perfume of coconut. Five days a week the nearly 500-degree ovens turn out 1,000 macaroons a minute. The slightly sticky, two-bite treats boast just three ingredients: egg whites, honey and shredded Filipino coconut; upon emerging from the oven they ride a conveyor belt up, up, up—until they're dumped into shiny aluminum canisters that'll be labeled "Jennies Macaroons." Those that don't make it meet their end on the concrete floor, get saved by a big basket or are sampled by the man behind the Williamsburg factory, Arnold Badner.

Decked out in running shorts, sneakers and a blue fleece pull-over, Badner, 68, has overseen the macaroon mecca since taking over the company in 1973. Back then he was obsessed with nutrition, not confection, but while the health-food dessert market wasn't the path he'd envisioned in his late 20s, the job fell into his lap when his father, who worked in the bakery distribution business, introduced him to the retirement-ready owner of a fruitcake factory called Spilke's.

The company baked pound cake, rum cake and fruitcake; macaroons were only for Passover. But under Badner's helm their popularity grew and he decided to offer them year-round, rechristening the product after his daughter, and eventually he let the cakes fade away.

"I never liked baked products and I never liked sugar," says Badner, "so I set out to make a healthy product." He touted the not-too-sweet sweets' positive properties (high in good fatty acids; low in added sugars), even when the anti-fat fad kicked coconut to the curb, and is delighted at the ingredient's recent exoneration. "Everything I used to read in the health industry has become mainstream," he says, a half-smile forming under his neat white beard.

More Jane Fonda than Willy Wonka, his running shorts aren't for show. Before a knee injury, he ran dozens of marathons around the world and, though he can't jog like he used to, he still logs over 3,000 miles of cycling each summer. His diet includes salmon at least five times a week. And, yes, plenty of lactic acid-rich macaroons. (He's in good company: pro volleyballer and model Gabrielle Reece cites them as her "favorite food," says Badner.)

"He is a maniac," says his older daughter, Lisa, lovingly. "He likes standing there lifting trays every day. I am like, 'Dad, you need to be in your office not lifting trays.'"



But while Badner's in better shape than most Brooklynites, his factory's longevity is in question. Neither of his daughters—not even Jenny—wants to run the company when he retires, so, come summer, Badner plans on merging with a like-minded Pennsylvania-based company called "New Harvest Naturals," which produces kosher, gluten-free, gourmet cakes. But don't expect Badner to disappear, especially from the labels, one of the only changes Badner has made over the years.

Those canisters now sport a canary-yellow background, blurry photos of plump macaroons and a picture of Badner circa 1979, signed, for no real reason, with the name Arnold Jennie. "I just did that cause it was kicky," says Badner, twirling one of his canisters on the conference room table. "I just decided to do it and could never change it. It's like a joke," he says, "and it worked." Just like his accidental plan to become the king of macaroons. 🍪

*You can find Jennies Macaroons from C-Town to Whole Foods to the Park Slope Food Coop. To see Arnold Badner as Arnold Jennie, visit [ediblebrooklyn.com](http://ediblebrooklyn.com).*