Detailed news story

Wellington chocolate company marks 11 years since kitchen startup

Kahurangi Chocolate Co. launches new berry bar as founder reflects on journey from rented kitchen to global team.

Kahurangi Chocolate Co. founder Marcus Reid launched his Wellington-based chocolate company 11 years ago in a rented kitchen with second-hand equipment and what he describes as "a very patient landlord".

The company marked this milestone at a launch event for its newest product, Kōpura, a 70% dark chocolate bar featuring freeze-dried New Zealand raspberries, blueberries and blackberries.

"When I started Kahurangi 11 years ago in a rented kitchen in Wellington with second-hand equipment and a very patient landlord, I made myself one promise," Reid told guests at the launch event. "That I would never put something on a shelf that I wasn't genuinely proud of."

The company has grown from its humble kitchen beginnings to include dedicated innovation, marketing, sales and supply chain teams around the world. Reid credits this expanded workforce with enabling the development of products like Kōpura, which took eight months of recipe development.

"A product like this doesn't come from one person," Reid said, acknowledging team members including Hemi, the Head of innovation, Priya from marketing, Elena from sales, and Sarah from supply chain.

The new chocolate bar represents the company's continued focus on ingredient transparency, containing only four components: dark chocolate, raspberries, blueberries and blackberries. "No additives. No stabilisers. Nothing you can't pronounce. Just four things that belong together," Reid explained.

The product development process began 18 months ago when Reid asked his head of innovation a simple question about creative freedom.

"If you could make anything, with no constraints, what would you make?" Reid recalled asking Hemi. "He didn't hesitate. He said: a dark chocolate bar with real fruit. Not flavouring. Not extract. Real fruit, done properly."

The development process involved eight recipe iterations, sourcing conversations with berry growers, and detailed discussions about freeze-drying techniques and berry ratios. Reid described the process as complex despite his team's modest characterisation of the work.

Consumer testing conducted earlier this year provided validation for the product direction. Reid noted that testers consistently used similar language when describing the chocolate bar.

"When our researcher played back the language people used, one phrase kept coming up," Reid said. "They called it the real thing. Not our customers. Not people who were paid to say something nice. Strangers, tasting a product for the first time, reaching for the same words independently."

Reid described this consumer feedback as more meaningful than traditional purchase intent metrics.

The launch event brought together journalists, retailers, customers and business associates as the first external audience to taste the new product. Reid positioned the launch as more than a product introduction.

"We weren't just launching a new product. We were making a statement about what this brand stands for," he said.

The company's growth trajectory from its Wellington kitchen origins reflects Reid's commitment to maintaining quality standards while scaling operations. He acknowledged that preserving initial values becomes increasingly challenging as businesses expand.

"That sounds simple. It's actually the hardest thing to hold onto as a business grows," Reid said about his original quality promise.

The Kōpura launch represents what Reid describes as his proudest achievement in 11 years of chocolate making. The product development team's focus on real fruit rather than artificial flavourings or extracts aligns with the company's ingredient transparency approach.

Reid's acknowledgement of his team's contributions highlights the company's evolution from a single-person operation to a multi-departmental organisation. The innovation team handled recipe development, marketing managed brand storytelling, sales secured retail partnerships, and supply chain ensured ingredient quality.

The company's retail presence has expanded to include partnerships that required convincing retailers of the product's shelf-space worthiness, according to Reid's comments about the sales team's efforts.

Consumer research played a significant role in validating the product concept, with Reid emphasising the importance of authentic feedback from unbiased testers rather than existing customers or paid participants.

The freeze-drying technique used for the berries represents a technical approach to preserving fruit integrity within the chocolate matrix. This method allows the inclusion of real fruit pieces while maintaining the product's shelf stability and texture.

Reid's reflection on the company's journey from its Wellington kitchen startup to its current multi-team structure illustrates the challenges of maintaining founding principles during business growth. The launch event served as both a product introduction and a reaffirmation of the company's commitment to ingredient quality and transparency.

The evening concluded with Reid directing any product feedback to Hemi rather than himself, demonstrating confidence in his innovation team's work while maintaining the collaborative spirit that has characterised the company's development over its 11-year history.