

MASTERS OF THEIR CRAFT

VAN LEEUWEN ARTISAN ICE CREAM



“...the three of us set out to make the best possible ice cream using only exceptional ingredients without any fillers, gums or stabilizers and build a beautiful truck to serve it off.”

Van Leeuwen Artisan Ice Cream

Written by Karen McGrady
A production of Char Co

Never underestimate the power of the iconic American ice cream truck. And never underestimate the influence of three dynamic minds that embark on a course to take ice cream making back to its original roots. In 2008, Laura O'Neill and brothers Pete and Ben Van Leeuwen began selling one of America's favorite indulgences from their sleek ice cream truck in the midst of New York City. Humbly stated, the streets of the Big Apple gave Van Leeuwen Artisan Ice Cream a warm welcome.

In less than a decade, this trio would find themselves opening seven

stores, adding five more trucks, and wholesaling to Whole Foods, as well as several other stores. They also expanded to the west coast and have recently released their highly anticipated cookbook of favorite recipes. Most likely Van Leeuwen will be opening in other locales across the nation, and who can predict their international influence.

You may wonder, “Why the success?” One, the taste and flavor options. AMAZING. Two, the ingredients. Their motto is “using ingredients perfected by nature, not science.”



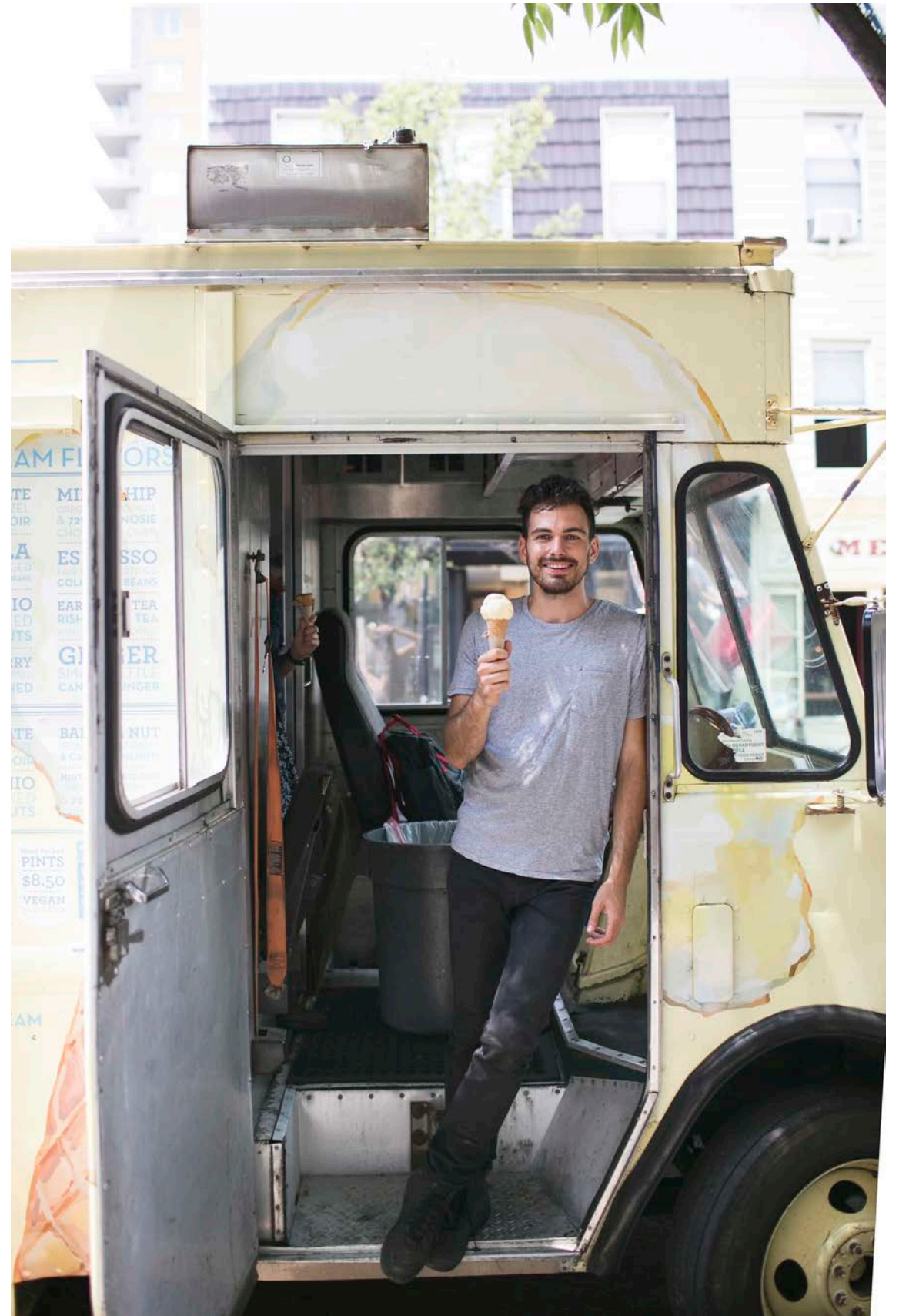
Few places offer ice cream sans chemical additives. They keep their component list very basic: fresh milk or cream, cane sugar, and egg yolks. Add to that the vegan options or the ingredients from their artisan producers and farmers, and you have a truly remarkable product. Three, their integrity. The American brothers and their Australian counterpart refer to their business as a “100% passion driven project.” Rather than aiming to simply make the largest possible profit, they choose to invest in quality ingredients and pay their employees well, which might cost them more but

in the end has led to the deeper success of Van Leeuwen Artisan Ice Cream.

Ice cream evokes a powerful nostalgia from our childhoods. Ice cream was and continues to be a treat, a reward, a celebration, a brief moment in time when all is right in the world. We have the Van Leeuwen brothers and Laura O'Neill to thank for perfecting one of life's simplest pleasures.







HOW DO THE THREE OF YOU KNOW EACH OTHER?

Ben and I met in London in 2006 when I was visiting from Australia, and he was doing a semester abroad. We began dating, and about a year later we moved to Brooklyn together. We are no longer a couple, but remain business partners and close friends. Ben and Pete are brothers.

WHAT DID YOUR LIVES LOOK LIKE BEFORE BEGINNING VAN LEEUWEN?

Ben was in college; I was working as an event producer in Melbourne; and Pete was art handling, working in marketing for a vodka company and playing in a band.

WHERE DID THE IDEA TO START VAN LEEUWEN ARTISAN ICE CREAM ORIGINATE?

While Ben was still in college, he and Pete spent a couple of summers driving ice cream trucks around the suburbs of Connecticut. They had a lot of fun and made some great money, but were not inspired by the kind of ice creams they were selling. During Ben's last semester at college, the thought hit him that NYC had plenty of ice cream trucks, but none that were serving a truly awesome product. He shared the idea with Pete and me. Soon the three of us set out to make the best possible ice cream using only exceptional ingredients without any fillers, gums or stabilizers and build a beautiful truck to serve it off.

HOW DO YOU DIVVY UP THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE BUSINESS?

Pete heads up our west coast operation of two trucks and soon to be two stores, and Ben and I hold down the home base in Brooklyn. We all naturally have strengths that we play to (Ben with the recipe development and me with design, marketing and operations), but being a small business, it's all about just doing whatever needs to be done. We don't have a team big enough to tick off the boxes, so we all still wear many hats.

YOU SAY YOU "CELEBRATE INGREDIENTS PERFECTED BY NATURE, NOT SCIENCE." DOES THIS TRANSLATE INTO YOUR PERSONAL DIETS AS WELL?

Absolutely. The three of us are all good home cooks and definitely gravitate towards

healthy, real foods. We eat fish, but no meat and love to eat vegan when possible too.

HOW DID YOU LEARN YOUR BUSINESS SKILLS? WHAT TYPE OF EDUCATION/TRAINING HAVE YOU RECEIVED?

Ben majored in business, but I think a lot of our business sense is a combination of intuition and learning as we go. Having three partners is great, since we always have three perspectives to help bullet-proof our business decisions. Van Leeuwen is 100% a passion driven project, so sometimes we are not making best business decisions, but we will never compromise the integrity of our product in the name of business or making money.

IN WHAT WAYS HAVE YOU SEEN THE BUSINESS GROW SINCE YOU OPENED IN 2008?

We started with one truck and now have four (soon to be seven!) stores and six trucks. We also wholesale our pints to Whole Foods and a bunch of other stores in the tristate area. In addition to Van Leeuwen, we also have an Indonesian Restaurant called Selamat Pagi in Greenpoint. Selamat Pagi opened in 2012 and echoes the same dedication to quality and ingredients as Van Leeuwen, but in the savory kitchen. Van Leeuwen is currently operating out of 800 s.f. in the back of Selamat Pagi, but in a few weeks we will be moving in to a 5000 s.f. space a few blocks away...something we are very excited for!!

“Van Leeuwen is 100% a passion driven project, so sometimes we are not making best business decisions, but we will never compromise the integrity of our product in the name of business or making money.”



“It’s all about striking that balance between what feels good to us and what our customers want.”





173

Van Leeuwen
152 DRIGGS AVENUE
BROOKLYN, NY 11222
www.vanleeuwenicecream.com

Ice Cream & Vegan Ice Cream

Hi!
We're open 20' 11'00' - 11'00' PM
ARTISAN
CLASSIC ICE CREAMS
COCONUT & CASHW NUT
RAW COCOA BUTTER
33% HIGH COCONUT OIL
ORGANIC SUGAR CANE
NO STABILIZERS, PRESERVATIVES
INGREDIENTS PERFECTLY
NATURE, NOT SCIENCE
Laura, Pete, Ben

Ice Cream & Vegan Ice Cream

NO
GMO
SOY
FREE
VEGAN
EST
BROOKLYN
2008

Everas

VLAIC
VANLEEUEWENICECREAM

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT BUSINESS LESSONS YOU HAVE LEARNED SINCE YOU STARTED VAN LEEUWEN?

About four years ago we moved our production from upstate NY to Brooklyn. This has been awesome, as we are now able to make new flavors and specials all the time. Initially Van Leeuwen's menu was mostly classic flavors that celebrate one exceptional ingredient. We still make all those classics, but have learned along the way the market also wants some more decadent and crazy flavors, so we make those too now, but we do them our way. That means always making everything from scratch (cookies, toffees, syrups, crumbles, etc.). It's all about striking that balance between what feels good to us and what our customers want.

HOW DO YOU KEEP YOUR FOOD TRUCKS SO CLEAN? DO CUSTOMERS NOTICE?

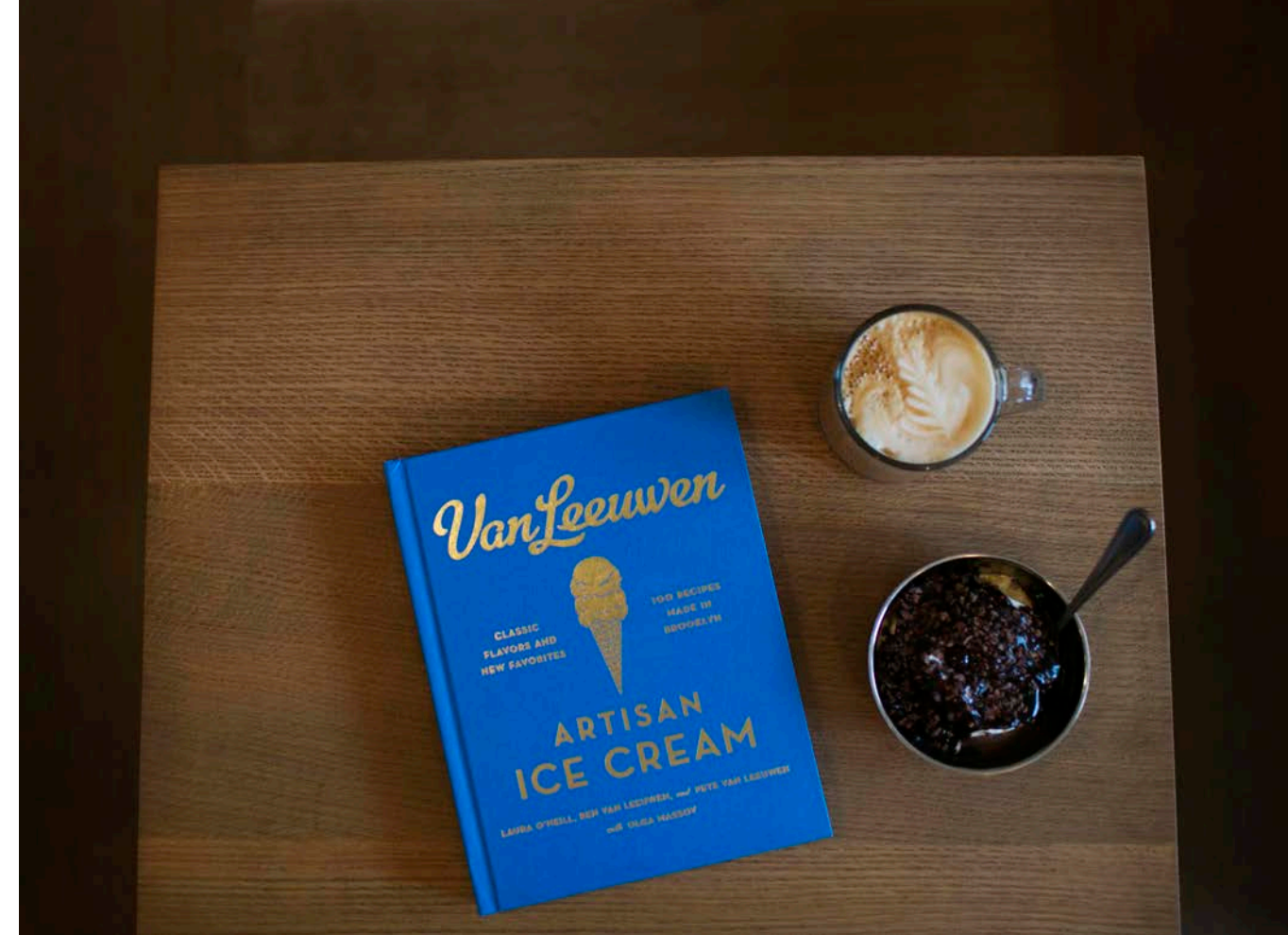
This was something that was very important to us when we were starting and designing the trucks. We wanted to make them beautiful to visit and great to work in. We have a lot of checklists and hire awesome team members who take pride in their jobs, including keeping the trucks nice and clean.

WHAT OBSTACLES DO YOU HAVE TO OVERCOME OPERATING OUT OF A FOOD TRUCK?

Luckily, ice cream is a nice simple product to serve from trucks and creates little to no waste. I can't imagine operating a savory kitchen from a truck. The trucks can be tricky though, as there are a lot of moving parts and opportunities for things to go wrong (flat battery, flat tires and such), but we love the trucks and being mobile is great for new locations and events. They are also such a big part of our story and brand identity.

WHERE DO YOU MAKE ALL OF YOUR ICE CREAM?

Currently out the back of Selamat Pagi in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, but soon we are moving to a brand new dedicated ice cream space, also in Greenpoint. The new space is going to be amazing, and we will be able to do tons more flavors, ice cream sandwiches, ice cream cakes, classes, etc.



WHO DEVELOPS THE RECIPES AND DO YOU HAVE ANY PERSONAL FAVORITE FLAVORS?

These days Ben heads up most of the recipe development with our team, but Pete and I also get involved with ideas and special flavor creations. It's not so calculated; we just have an idea and then explore how to make it as awesome as possible. We just put out a cookbook in June that we are immensely proud of, including 100 of our favorite recipes. We really love the cream fraiche with apple crumble and calvados recipe and the cold brewed vegan earl grey tea recipe (see recipe at end of interview) to name a couple.

HOW DOES ATTIRE COME INTO PLAY FOR YOUR BUSINESS? DO YOU HAVE A DRESS CODE?

We don't have a strict dress code, just a few guidelines (hat, closed shoes, etc.). We recently introduced beautiful custom-made Japanese denim aprons that were made by our friend and local jeans-maker Loren Cronk. Our Managers helped design the aprons too, based on what is good for working.







YOU HAVE EXPANDED TO OPERATING A FOOD TRUCK IN LOS ANGELES AND OPENING AN INDONESIAN RESTAURANT IN BROOKLYN. ANY OTHER FUTURE EXPANSION PLANS? WHERE DO YOU SEE THE BUSINESS IN FIVE YEARS FROM NOW?

Yes, Pete Van Leeuwen relocated to L.A. about 18 months ago to oversee that expansion. We currently have two trucks there and will be opening a store in the Arts District, followed by one in Culver City in the winter. It's been a long time dream to be on the west coast, so it's very exciting. Selamat Pagi will celebrate its 3rd anniversary in October and has gone from strength to strength thanks to our awesome Chef Vinh Nguyen and our GM/Beverage Director Taylor Vaught and team. We are doing a lot of growing this year and really want to continue to expand to other parts of the country, so hopefully five years from now will see a bunch more VL stores and our pints all over America (and maybe even internationally too!).

WHAT HAVE BEEN SOME OF THE MOST EFFECTIVE MARKETING TECHNIQUES YOU HAVE?

We love social media; it's a great (and free!) way to connect directly with our customers. It's also been so awesome to have our cookbook out, 100 recipes and stories that share the past eight years of Van Leeuwen with our readers.

IN WHAT WAYS DO YOU INVEST IN YOUR EMPLOYEES AND CREATE AN ATMOSPHERE WHERE THEY ENJOY WORKING?

From the very beginning it was important to us to create an environment that is nice to work in and a product that the team can be proud to serve. We've always paid our team well above minimum wage, even in the early days. We try to strike the balance between creating an awesome and consistent experience for our customers and also allowing our team members' personalities and creativity to shine. We also exclusively play vinyl in our stores, which the teams love. We love to promote from within the company; there's a lot of room for growth for our team members.

HOW DO YOU PLACE A PRIORITY ON CUSTOMER SERVICE?

Customer service is extremely important to us. People have a lot of options in terms of where they can spend their time and money, and we are very grateful that they choose us. We strive to provide exceptional, sincere customer service



Bedford Av





while serving the best product in a beautiful environment. We also place a great deal of importance on product knowledge. Our team members are trained up to be able to share what makes our ice cream so special with our customers.

HAVE YOU EVER HAD ANY CONFLICTS BETWEEN THE THREE OF YOU? IF SO, HOW DO YOU RESOLVE THEM AND HOW DO YOU MAINTAIN A STRONG WORKING RELATIONSHIP?

Big time, ha-ha! Of course when working with family there are less boundaries, but overall I think we are lucky to be able to communicate freely and openly with each other. We also really do get along great and care about each other so much. How much we all care has made VL what it is today.

WITH YOUR FOOD TRUCKS, RESTAURANT, AND STORES, DO YOU FIND TIME TO VACATION? IF SO, WHERE DO YOU ENJOY TRAVELING?

It's tough to find the time. We definitely feel guilty leaving sometimes, but we all love to travel. Traveling is so important to our general happiness, so we make it a priority. Luckily being three of us, we can hold down the fort when one of us is away. I'm actually writing this from a flight to Tokyo, where I'm going to meet up with my parents. I also go back to Melbourne every Christmas. Ben loves traveling to Europe, and he and Pete went to Africa and Sri Lanka together a couple of years ago. We love traveling and finding amazing places to eat. Selamat Pagi was born out of a bunch of trips Ben and I took to Bali a few years ago.

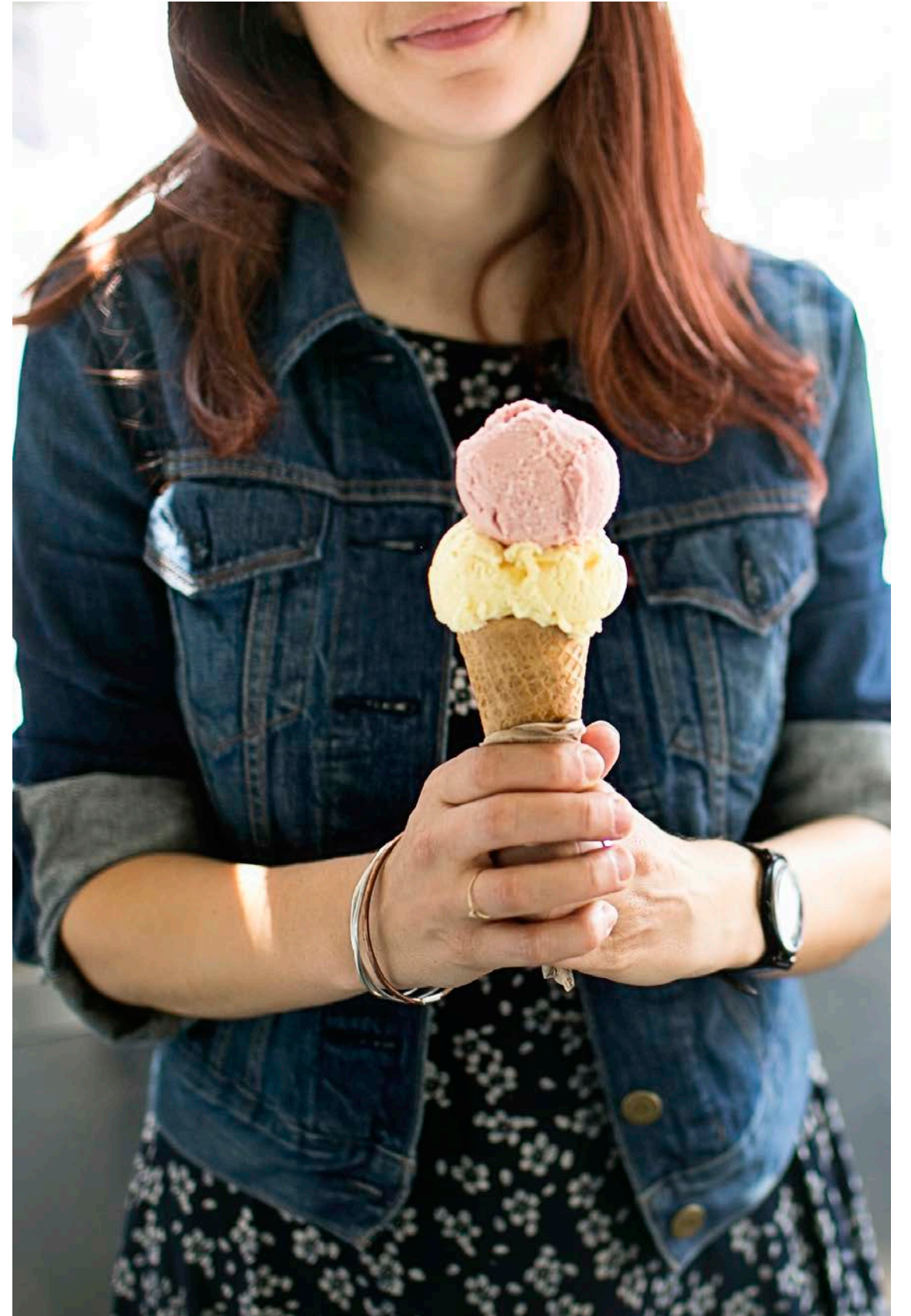
IF YOU WEREN'T OPERATING VAN LEEUWEN, WHAT WOULD YOU WANT TO BE DOING?

I'm also in a band (called Laura & Greg) so would definitely be making music. Pete is also a musician so likely would be doing that or working with animals, and I think Ben would probably be in another food biz.

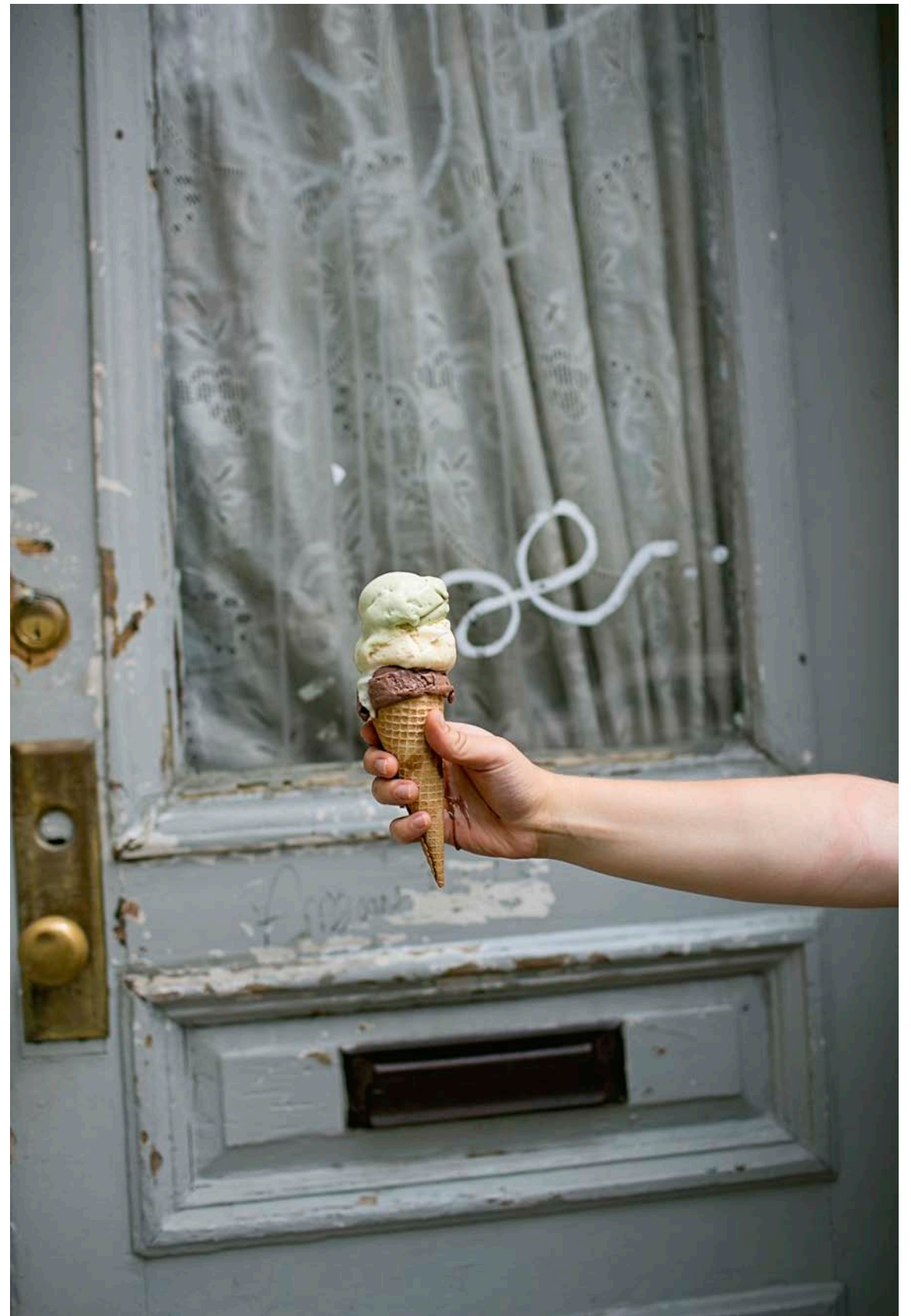
WHAT ARE THE BEST REWARDS OF RUNNING YOUR BUSINESS?

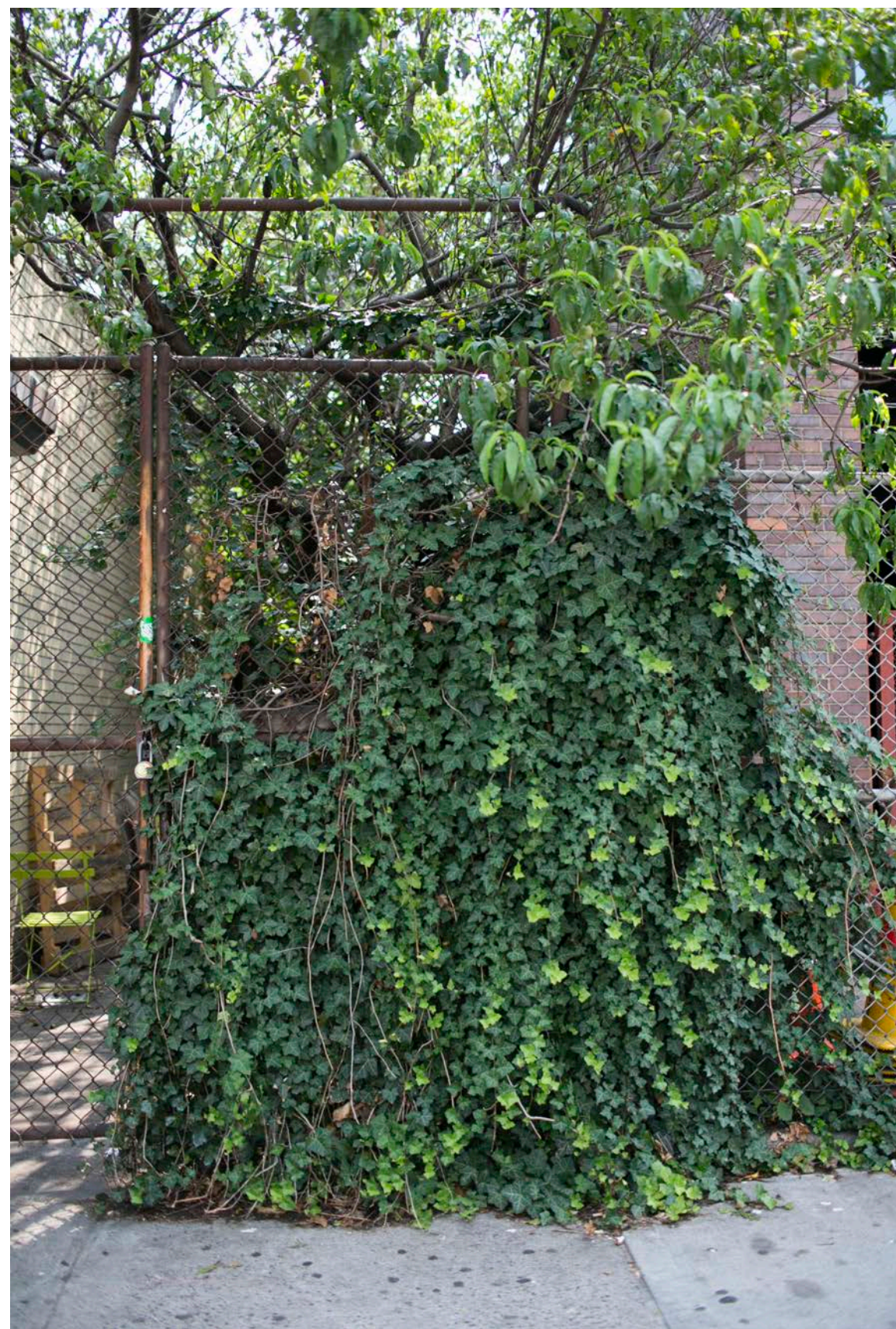
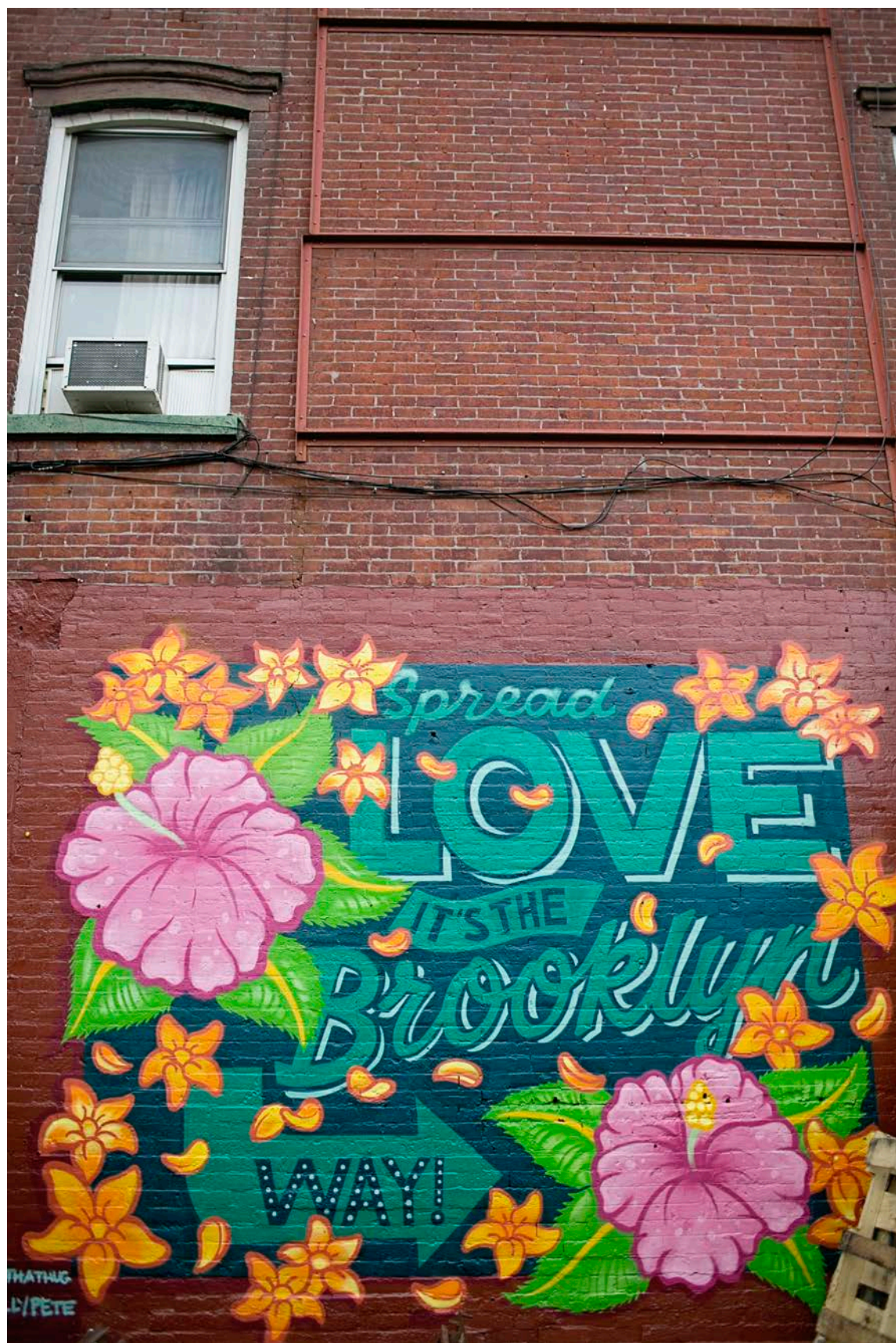
Seeing people enjoy our ice cream! There's nothing better.















Hi!
WELCOME TO *VanLeeuwen*

ARTISAN
CLASSIC ICE CREAMS

FRESH MILK
AND CREAM

*made
with*

CANE SUGAR
EGG YOLKS

VEGAN ICE CREAMS
with only

COCONUT & CASHEW MILK
RAW COCOA BUTTER
EXTRA VIRGIN COCONUT OIL
ORGANIC SUGAR CANE

NO STABILIZERS, FILLERS,
GUMS OR "NATURAL FLAVORS"!

INGREDIENTS PERFECTED

BY
NATURE, NOT SCIENCE

Enjoy!

Laura, Pete + Ben

VEGAN COLD-BREWED
EARL GREY TEA ICE CREAM

At Van Leeuwen, we are big fans of social media—not only is it great for getting your message out, but it also connects you with amazing people and brings you closer to your audience. And it's thanks to social media that we now serve our vegan Earl Grey flavor. It started with one of our Instagram followers who kept asking us, time after time, when we'd have this flavor available as a vegan version. We're so glad we listened to her—it's absolutely delicious!

MAKES ABOUT 1½ PINTS

SPECIAL EQUIPMENT

Immersion blender

1 cup (212 grams) coconut
milk (see page 146)

1 cup (212 grams) Cashew
Milk (page 180)

¾ cup (150 grams)
granulated sugar

6 tablespoons (30 grams)
loose Earl Grey tea
(see Sources, page 218)

6 tablespoons (60 grams)
cocoa butter

¼ cup (60 grams) extra-
virgin coconut oil

½ teaspoon (2 grams)
kosher salt

1. Pour the coconut milk, cashew milk, sugar, tea, and 2 tablespoons (30 grams) water into a tall (2-quart or larger) container. Stir to combine; cover and refrigerate for 12 to 24 hours. Stir the liquid, then strain it into a large bowl, pressing on the solids; discard the tea leaves in the strainer. Return the liquid to the container and set aside.
2. In a small saucepan, melt the cocoa butter and coconut oil together over low heat until combined. Stir in the salt and remove from the heat.
3. Gently pour the cocoa butter mixture into the coconut milk mixture. Using an immersion blender, buzz the liquids together until emulsified. Cover and refrigerate the ice cream base until chilled, 1 to 2 hours. Do not refrigerate overnight. (If you must refrigerate overnight, "loosen" the solidified ice cream base by placing the container in a bowl with some warm water until it becomes more liquid.)
4. Pour the chilled ice cream base into an ice cream maker and freeze according to the manufacturer's instructions. Place the container in which you refrigerated the custard in the freezer so you can use it to store the finished ice cream. Churn the ice cream until the texture resembles "soft serve." Transfer the ice cream to the chilled storage container and freeze until hardened to your desired consistency. Alternatively, you can serve it immediately—it will be the consistency of gelato. The ice cream will keep, frozen, for up to 7 days.