Edward Riando Picasauw: Yogyakarta's famous chocolatier

Kusumasari Ayuningtyas, The Jakarta Post, Yogyakarta | People | Thu, April 24 2014, 12:46 PM

Candy man: College dropout Edward Riando Picasauw says he never thought about chocolate beyond the occasional candy bar. Now he makes some of Yogyakarta's most famous confections. *JP/Kusumari Ayuningtyas*

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Edward Riando Picasauw never thought he would become a chocolatier when he arrived in Yogyakarta in 1996. He says that his only experience with chocolate was buying a few bars, as he received only Rp 150,000 (US$12.90) a month in pocket money from his parents.

The man, born in Samarinda, East Kalimantan, was studying at Sanata Dharma University's economics department in Yogyakarta, after he was twice rejected for admission by the Military Academy in Magelang, Central Java.

"When I left Samarinda for Yogyakarta, actually I wasn't even thinking of studying. I just wanted to wander as a migrant in another region," said Edward, now the happily married father of two.

Edo, as he is commonly called, says that he wasn't serious about studying when at Sanata Dharma. He dropped out for a year to reflect on what he would do with his life.

He stopped attending lectures, working or going to church, instead staying in his boarding house (kost) playing games and sleeping, all the while telling his parents that his studies were going smoothly.

Finally, his father found out and told Edo that there were no answers to his existential questions. These words awakened Edo to a new awareness, he says. "I'm just an ordinary person. I shouldn't have been so arrogant."

A year later he met Thierry Detournay, a chocolate maker from Belgium, who he met through a friend's fiancé in 2000. At the time, Detournay was producing chocolate candies called Kulit Cokelat.

A friend, Sugiasih, helped Detournay make the chocolate, which he sold out of a cooler box while driving around on a pink Vespa.

Edo, however, was uninterested. "When I met Thierry, I was resuming my studies and working part-time as a parking attendant," said Edo, who never earned his bachelor's degree.

Two years later, Edo was working as a manager at a French restaurant and began thinking of cooperating with Detournay, whose chocolate bars were also sold at the eatery. "His chocolate was different from all the pieces I bought."

Valentine's Day in 2003 gave Edo momentum to launch Cokelat Monggo. Edo was selling Detournay's chocolate to retail shops, mostly as Valentine products. After a good response, they started supplying the shops regularly.

Despite brusque business, Edo and Detournay could not pay themselves salaries until 2006, although they did pay six employees.

Only after the pair managed to earn reasonable income did Edo tie the knot in 2007, which he said was a bit late.

Although Cocoa Mania, their product, received a warm market reception, their trademark request, was rejected since another brand used a similar name and "cocoa", as a natural plant, cannot be used in trademarks.

"At last we decided to meet. At this meeting, one of us said in Javanese and Indonesian, 'ya wes, monggo saja mau dikasih nama apa'." The phrase means all right then, please give any name, it will be okay. "So the idea struck us that monggo should be the name," Edo said, after the Javanese for welcome.

"I've changed my dream to join the military by doing business here," said Edo, referring to his failed attempts to get military training.

For Edo, Cokelat Monggo remains a home industry, given that 80 percent of production is done manually. "The difference is that we're now using bigger mixers than we did previously," Edo adds, laughing.

Although the chocolate was originally made by a Belgian, Cokelat Monggo produces genuine Indonesian snacks, processed in Indonesia with 90 percent local materials by Indonesian workers, except Detournay, the Belgian who finally also married an Indonesian, Edo says.

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