The last stop on the European gastronomic tour this summer was Berlin. There were all kinds of envisaged treats there of course….and then there was one very unenvisaged one.

This unexpected delight is a fabulous shop – and I use the word ‘fabulous’ for its ‘out of this world’ meaning – because it oozes the stuff of fable, and fairy stories. Kadó (https://www.kado.de/) is the sort of shop which might feature in a Roald Dahl tale. In short it’s a shop which contains just about every known type of liquorice known to man. Or rather, in this case, it contains every type known to woman; specifically, in fact, known to Ilse Böge.

And, Ilse very kindly agreed to answer all my questions about how her interest in liquorice grew into a thriving specialist business; about what liquorice actually is; and, of particular interest to me, about how it can be used in cooking.

CONGRATULATIONS TO KADÓ, CELEBRATING TWENTY YEARS OF SPECIALIST LIQUORICE SALES TODAY!
SD: How did you come to be interested in liquorice in the beginning?

IB: I have always liked liquorice since childhood; my mum had always liquorice in her Mittagsstunde (this is a rest/nap on the couch with the newspaper after lunch). I used to lie on the floor in front of the couch with my book and my small fingers would fetch under her pillow for liquorice too.

SD: How did you build up the business?
IB: I started off with a market stall at the Winterfeldtmarkt in Schoeneberg back in 1996. The idea was to do a bit of market research. I couldn’t find, in Berlin, the good selection of liquorice that I’d taken for granted when I was growing up near the Dutch border – I wondered if any other people did too.

Some did know about the salty liquorice you can get in The Netherlands or Denmark. Most knew only of the pipes and wheels you could get in supermarkets then. And in those days the stronger pastilles were only available in pharmacies!

The following year I rented a storage space. This property needed a lot of work, but with the help of friends we renovated it, even adding coving. It soon became clear that it would make a nice little shop. Another friend, the photographer Dirk Soboll, helped design the interior. Liquorice has been enjoyed for hundreds of years, it’s old, so we wanted some old items like the scales and the till. But we also wanted to show how it can be used in new and different ways.

We used glass, steel and wood to give a modern, uncluttered look which enabled us to put the spotlight on our product – liquorice!

So we wanted to give an overall modern impression as well which we did using glass, steel and wood. Also, with a clear and clean interior we could put the spotlight on the product.
SD: What were the main challenges, and what are the principal business lessons that you have learnt?

IB: First of all I needed a loan – but to begin with none of the banks understood what I was trying to do. They wanted me to include other products – chocolate at least, or tea, or even children’s clothes.

Then I had to learn all the things every shopkeeper needs to know – how do I find the liquorice lovers of the city, and how do they find me; how do I price the goods; and what does the tax office want from me, among many other things.

We had no money for advertising, but we’ve been lucky: the idea of a specialist liquorice shop caught the imagination of the press and I was invited onto Volker Wieprecht’s Radio Show.

Looking back I would say that you have to learn to cut a complex thing into small steps and it helps if you find it easy to make decisions. You should never stand still – we are still, after twenty years, working on the idea of Kadó.

SD: What exactly is liquorice and how is it made?

IB: Liquorice is a cooked sweet root (from the plant Glycyrrhiza glabra) – the origins of the word ‘liquorice’ come from the Greek word γλυκύρριζα, which means sweet root. That’s the pure form. Most liquorice on sale is a combination of this pure form together with glucose, starch, and various flavourings to make it chewier. The flavourings aren’t necessarily sweet – liquorice can also be very salty, that’s more famous in Scandinavia. Additionally there is also likely to be flour; a glazing agent (such as anise oil or beeswax); a dye (vegetable carbon and coloured liquorice with other food dyes); and a gelling agent (gum arabic, agar agar, or gelatine).

Today some 90% of liquorice is used to flavour tobacco.

SD: Tell us a bit about the history of liquorice.

IB: For a long time (ancient Egyptian pharaohs enjoyed chewing it as long ago as 2044 BC) it was mostly known for its medicinal properties (which have yet to be proved conclusively, too much of it can be toxic). Alexander the Great’s
soldiers used it to stave off thirst as they marched through deserts.

Later, in England, Pontefract Cakes came into being apparently when a sugar pot accidentally fell into some raw liquorice liquid. According to the agricultural historian, John Chartres, writing in an article published in 2004, the original Pontefract cake “was almost certainly a black cake, the portable lozenge used to make ‘liquorish water’, stamped with the castle lodge emblem of Pontefract to signify quality. This trade mark had been employed on Pontefract cakes since 1612”. Liquorice was used in those days mostly to aid digestion.

Then in 1760 an entrepreneurial apothecary from Pontefract, George Dunhill, added more sugar and people began to eat liquorice as a sweet instead of a medicine. Dunhill’s company has since been bought by the German sweet manufacturer, Haribo, which continues to make his Pontefract Cakes over 250 years later.

Liquorice also comes in useful as a theatrical prop. Ivan the Terrible liked to blacken his teeth with it. Sometime later liquorice was used to sculpt the shoe which Charlie Chaplin cooks, serves, and eats in the film, Goldrush. More recently in the James Bond film, Moonraker, liquorice manufactured in Pontefract was used to make a cable (off a cable car) which the baddie has to bite through. You can see a clip of this episode in the video at the bottom of this post.

SD: What are the different types of liquorice and which is best for what?

IB: Natural liquorice tastes bitter and has no sugar. But there is a wide range of recipes.

Sweet liquorice can be filled with fruit or mint, or it can be covered with raspberry or chocolate. It can incorporate caramel, blackberry, blackcurrants, blueberry [my favourite – Ed], strawberry, ginger, thyme, bay, violet, anis.

Salty liquorice is rather special and eaten mostly, as I mention above, in Scandinavian countries, where it’s known as salmiak, and The Netherlands where it’s known as Zoute Drop. This liquorice has ammonium chloride added to it – it gives it an astringent, tongue-numbing effect.

We import liquorice from Iceland to Sicily and every country has its favourite taste and texture.
Use liquorice powder, sparingly, for cooking.

IB: The easiest recipe is the dressing for salad:

- 2 soup spoons of fresh lemon juice
- 4 soup spoons of olive oil
- a half teaspoon pure liquorice powder
- salt and pepper

Mix all the above to make a vinaigrette for 300g mixed green salad of frisée, radicchio, and other green leaves, together with a stick of celery, a pear, 100g pecorino cheese and 10 walnuts. Serve with crunchy white bread roasted in butter with a hint garlic.

Or try cooking a “dark” pear-chutney with a more daring amount of liquorice powder and serve it with mozzarella and tomato; or with sliced meat and a glass of wine.

You can buy all the types of liquorice mentioned in this post from the [Kadó](https://www.kado.de/) online shop.

_Source: https://saucydressings.foodzube.co.uk/liquorice/"