



love bananas. They are available all year round, so one does not have to wait until the next season in order to maximize their potential flavor. Unfortunately, many consumers today simply won't pick up a banana just because of blemishes on the outer skin, which we all know (chefs and knowledgeable consumers) that if it's blemished on the outside, it just means that the banana is ripe and thus sweeter to eat.

As for pasta, I like anything that is made with the loving hands of a chef or cook. Enjoying the textures of anything that can simply compliment pasta with its absorbent quality can only be good.

*Editor's Note: Fox & Obel is open 364 days a year — closed Dec. 25 — and boasts a sumptuous array of gourmet products. Visit [www.fox-obel.com](http://www.fox-obel.com) for more detailed information.*

## Gary Poppins Goads Garrett's Popcorn

Chicago tourists have much to see in the Windy City: the Sears Tower, Navy Pier, Wrigley Field. And as they walk up and down the Magnificent Mile that is Michigan Avenue, shoppers often stop (and wait in a long line) at a local favorite: Garrett's Popcorn. Garrett's has been in business since 1949, and its Chicago Mix of cheese and caramel is the popcorn of choice for native Chicagoans ... and visitors.

Now, a new Chicago-area popcorn provider is challenging the Garrett's tradition with its own innovations. Evanston, Ill.-based Gary Poppins currently has one storefront and is available in 100 specialty stores nationwide. Chicago hotels such as the W and the Park Hyatt also carry the Gary

Poppins product. The company soon will have distribution in Paris, too.

But company president Gary Poppins isn't stopping there. Next on his expansion list is a shop right on Michigan Avenue.

"A lot of people come to my store and ask, 'Are you like that popcorn downtown?'" Poppins says. "I say, 'Check it out. You tell me.'"

The gourmet popcorn purveyor sells made-fresh, hand-packed flavors such as French Vanilla Coffee ("That's right. Coffee popcorn."), Pumpkin Spice ("It's scary good."), Chocolate



Marshmallow ("Campfires just got a whole lot easier.") and White Chocolate Oreo Mint ("It's heaven in a tin").

"I can come up with anything," Poppins says. The

store even sells its own three-way mix of caramel, cheese and kettle corn.

"People are willing to shell out \$3-\$5 for a cup of coffee, and I feel it's the same way with popcorn," Poppins says of his premium-priced product.

Move over Garrett's. Gary Poppins is primed for a takeover.