

BY CURTIS VREELAND

Elixirs of LOVE

ARTISAN DRINKING CHOCOLATE
FUELS CACAO ADDICTION

“One night George was invited to drink unrefined cacao with a pinch of chili, the very same drink ancient Mayas used in their sacred ceremonies. The Maya believed that cacao had the power to unlock hidden secrets and reveal destinies. And so it was that George first saw Chitza. Now, George had been raised a good Catholic, but in his romance with Chitza, he was willing to slightly bend the rules of Christian courtship.”

—FROM THE FILM *CHOCOLAT*

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BURDICK DRINKING CHOCOLATE

Drinking chocolate is hot. Made with rich, thick, melted chocolate shavings, drinking chocolate has become a fashionable and sophisticated indulgence. With Valentine's Day approaching, enterprising baristas have introduced chocolate beverages guaranteed to warm the heart. After all, chocolate and love are classic complements. "Just say the magic word 'chocolate,' and you will get a smile, as it brings out the goodness and happiness in people," says Maribel Lieberman, chocolatier and owner of New York-based Marie Belle. And who could fault Montezuma, who reportedly consumed 50 cups a day as his royal love potion Number 9?

With a wide variety of products available, now is a good time to consider adding drinking chocolate to your menu. Many of America's best artisan chocolatiers offer drinking chocolate in beautifully decorated tins and canisters for wholesale and bulk purchase. Artisan chocolates are handcrafted in small batches using all natural ingredients and traditional methods. Some producers have combined classic European techniques with American creativity to create innovative flavor combinations such as dark chocolate with coconut, cardamom and clove. These drinking chocolates definitely aren't your kids' cup of hot cocoa! (See "Sources" section for contact information.)

A growing number of chocolatiers prefer to call their products "drinking chocolate" rather than "hot chocolate" in order to distance these products from cheaper cocoa powder-based hot beverages. To some consumers, the name hot chocolate evokes a winter-only beverage, rather than a year-round indulgence. But whether you call it drinking chocolate or hot chocolate, the beverage consists of luscious, full-bodied shaved chocolate.

THE ALLURE OF CHOCOLATE

Drinking chocolate adds to the festive seasonal theme between Christmas and Valentine's Day. It can supplement your premium beverage line with little or no additional equipment investment. Chocolate and coffee are complementary flavors, such as when you add European-style drinking chocolate to a cup of coffee and create a mochachino masterpiece. They can be merchandised with the chocolatier's truffles, bonbons and bars for an added revenue source. Demand for drinking chocolate is greatest in the afternoon as an indulgent snack and in the evening as a drinkable dessert when sales of caffeinated drinks are slow. Since a cup of chocolate contains as little caffeine as a cup of decaf coffee, it is a low-caffeine but high-energy alternative drink.

WHAT'S THE BUZZ?

During the 18th century, chocolate- and coffeehouses acted as political and cultural meeting places for nobility and gentry. One of the oldest such houses was London's Cocoa-Tree Club, whose members included writer Jonathan Swift and

historian Edward Gibbon. Another was White's Chocolate House, which served up a heady mixture of chocolate, political debate and gambling. And at White's, one could observe patrons teaching "oaths to youngsters and to nobles wit," wrote poet Alexander Pope.

Today's salons are dominated by coffeehouses, but that may soon change. "Drinking chocolate is six years behind specialty coffee. But in the next six years, it will be a standard offering in your neighborhood coffee shop, much like the European salons of yore," predicts Eric Case, northeast sales director for Guittard Chocolate Company.

When did drinking chocolate have a revival? For L.A. Burdick, an artisan chocolatier in Walpole, N.H., the epiphany happened 10 years ago on a wintry morning when the owner used the shop's cappuccino machine to steam milk and add it to a mug of chocolate shavings. The resulting beverage triggered instant appeal and several years later won accolades from Food Network star David Rosengarten.

For Fran Bigelow, cited as one of America's best chocolatiers in "The Book of Chocolate" and winner of several NASFT Fancy Food awards, enlightenment struck in France. After sampling "pure heaven in a cup" at two of France's legendary chocolate shops—La Maison du Chocolat in Paris and Bernachon in Lyon—she introduced her own drinking chocolate in 1996.

For celebrity chocolatier Jacques Torres, inspiration came from a childhood memory of holding a cup of steaming hot chocolate on a blustery cold day in his native Provence, France. In 2001, he made trial batches for customers at his Brooklyn shop. Demand grew, and he started packaging Hot Chocolate Classic the following year. His Wicked Hot Chocolate was released in 2003 after it was inspired by a trip to Oaxaca, the epicenter for Mexican cocoa culture.

For John Scharffenberger, cofounder of San Francisco-based Scharffen Berger Chocolate Maker, the tipping point was 2003 in Barcelona. At 5 a.m., when the bars and clubs had closed, he was taken by a large group of revelers in a very small car to get "churros and chocolat." After all, the Spanish had been drinking hot chocolate for 400 years!

In 2004, Schokinag Chocolate introduced its line of European Drinking Chocolates at the New York City Fancy Food Show. The pioneering concept was extremely well received, and two products (German Chocolate Cake and Dulce de Leche) won prestigious Product Awards. By 2005, Schokinag had expanded its drinking chocolate line to nine flavors. By then the company was hauling a six-foot mobile rendition of its canister around the country, providing a backdrop for free product tastings. The Big Tin's wanderings have even inspired a blog: drinkyourchocolate.com.

Launched in 2004, Starbuck's Chantico gave the drinking chocolate category legitimacy, although the chocolate cognoscenti faulted the product's overly sweet and short flavor profile. (Chantico uses cocoa powder, not chocolate.) Cheri Hayes, for-

mer director of marketing for Caffè D'Amore, said that right after Chantico was released, sales of her company's drinking cocoa line increased 27 percent. Now the market has more than two dozen excellent artisan brands, most introduced within the past year.

STYLES

Drinking chocolates generally fall into five flavor styles: European or classic; spicy or Aztec; Mexican traditional; oriental; and historic. Each relies on a backbone of rich, all-natural chocolate shavings. Chocolate accounts for more than 60 percent of the products' ingredients, as compared with regular hot cocoas that contain as little as 10 percent cocoa. Regular hot cocoas generally are filled with nondairy creamers and artificial flavors, while artisan drinking chocolates contain natural ingredients and additions of fresh milk or cream. Chocolate syrups tend to be sweeter and lack chocolate's intensity or depth. True artisan drinking chocolates are like "drinking a truffle in a cup," says Maribel Lieberman.

MEDICAL BENEFITS

The health benefits of chocolate have been recognized for centuries. The Aztecs used chocolate to fatten emaciated patients, stimulate feeble patients, improve digestion and mask unpleasant herbal medicinal ingredients. "The divine drink of chocolate builds up resistance and fights fatigue. A cup of this precious drink permits a man to walk all day without food," wrote the Aztec conqueror Hernán Cortés to King Charles V of Spain. The beverage's energy-boosting ability appealed to 18th century aristocratic ladies, who adopted hot chocolate as part of their daily morning "levee," a glorified breakfast in bed. "People who habitually drink chocolate enjoy unvarying health and are least attacked by a host of little illnesses which can destroy the true joy of living," wrote culture critic Anthelme Brillat-Savarin in 1825.

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European or classic drinking chocolates are the beverage of choice for purists. Redolent with dark chocolate, aromatic vanilla and swirls of velvety cream, they invoke images of intimate Viennese coffeehouses or romantic Parisian cafés.

AZTEC- OR SPICY-STYLE DRINKING CHOCOLATES are designed for passion. They contain mouth-bursting flavors of chilis (usually smoky chipotle or sweet ancho), cinnamon and allspice. Drinking them can be as sense-tingling as a trek through a jaguar-infested jungle. Most artisan drinking chocolate companies offer traditional and spicy versions.

MEXICAN-STYLE DRINKING CHOCOLATES are inspired by America's growing Latino population, which has influenced mainstream food tastes. These products are less sweet and gritty than the Mexican-made products sold in blocks at family food markets. Examples include: Caffè D'Amore's Mexican Spiced Cocoa; Schokinag's Dulce de Leche and Kakawa Chocolate House's 1900s Oaxacan Mexican Chocolate Elixir.

ORIENTAL-STYLE DRINKING CHOCOLATES are extensions of the culinary interest in Indian cuisine. Like curries, these drinks wrap your tongue in multiple layers of flavors and sensations. Three wonderful examples: Chocolat Moderne's Kama Sutra Hot Chocolate, which contains robust dark chocolate (70 percent cocoa content), coconut, cardamom and clove; Knipschildt's Chai, with milk chocolate, cinnamon, ginger, cardamom, green tea and raw sugar; and Schokinag's Moroccan Spice.

HISTORIC RECREATION-STYLE DRINKING CHOCOLATE has been championed by Mark Sciscenti of Kakawa Chocolate House. An amateur archaeologist, Sciscenti combed historic texts for authentic chocolate recipes to faithfully re-create chocolate the way the Aztecs and Mayans enjoyed it. Following the original Mesoamerican preparation method, the chocolate is fashioned into small balls for grating into a cup of hot water. This produces strong, bittersweet, rich and well-seasoned brews. His Mayan Full Spice, for example, contains dark chocolate (99 percent), black pepper, allspice, rose petals, almonds, anise, achiote, vanilla, Chihuacle chili and agave syrup. Sciscenti also offers historic European- and American-style drinking chocolates, such as Spanish Chocolate (circa 1644), Tuscan Citrus Chocolate Elixir (1666), Jeffersonian American Chocolate Elixir (1790s) and others.

Recent medical studies show that chocolate is good for the heart—another reason for consuming it on Valentine’s Day. It contains flavonoids that have been shown to reduce the risk of heart disease and certain cancers. Most artisan drinking chocolates use non-alkalized cocoa powder that contains a higher ORAC value (measure of antioxidant levels) than conventional powder.

Chocolate also contains phenylethyl-

amine (PEA), a chemical released by the brain when we fall in love. With its ability to encourage physical prowess, it became the cocktail of choice for Casanova, Louis XV mistresses Mesdames du Barry and de Pompadour, and Marquee de Sade. As British writer Miranda Ingram once said, “It’s not that chocolates are a substitute for love. Love is a substitute for chocolate. Chocolate is, let’s face it, far more reliable than a man.”

MUG SHOTS


Not only are these drinking chocolates exciting and delicious to drink, their packaging is real eye candy. Chocolat Moderne’s tins are bur-nished gold with chocolaty brown arabesque designs. Marie Belle’s tins are brown with gold netting and a dia-mond-shaped center label of riveting turquoise blue. Lake Champlain uses a canister with edgy, contemporary graphics. Stacked in a pyramid on your countertop, these artfully decorated products will sell themselves.

Even the presentation of these chocolates invites drama. Imagine your customer’s heightened anticipa-tion as you carefully pour an arc of thick, steaming, aromatic chocolate into a waiting cup. Fritz Knipschildt, Maitre chocolatier and owner of Knipschildt Chocolatier, takes the art of drinking chocolate presentation one step further. A multiple winner of NASFT Fancy Food Finalist awards, Knipschildt’s drinking chocolates are molded into small pyramids and attached to sticks. The preparer stirs these Hot Chocolate & Coffee Sticks into a cup of hot milk or coffee and thus transforms an ordinary cup of joe into a sublime beverage.

Being a very rich beverage, a little drinking chocolate can go a long way. Generally speaking, the stronger the cocoa content, the smaller the serv-ing cup. Chocolate containing 70 per-cent cocoa content and mixed with hot water can be served in a four-ounce to a six-ounce cup. Chocolates with lower cocoa content or those mixed with hot milk or cream can be presented in eight-ounce café au lait cups with wide mouths to better disperse the choco-laty aromas. These cups also provide great seascapes to float cubes of hand-crafted marshmallows.



Drinking chocolate must be pre-pared properly in order to produce a deliciously creamy and thick beverage. Many baristas simply heat the drinking chocolate on demand in a cappuccino

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machine. While this saves on equipment costs, it tends to produce a gritty and sometimes scorched product. The preferred method is to use a specialty machine that dispenses a ready-to-serve beverage that is consistently hot and creamy. Dennis Fletcher, director of marketing for Buffet Enhancements, a leading supplier of drinking chocolate dispensers, offers this advice on selecting the right machine:

- It should have indirect heat and rotating dashers to maintain both a proper serving temperature and a smooth, lump-free consistency.
 - It should have a removable beverage container that can be refrigerated for next-day use.
 - It should embody simplicity of design and operation and be easy to clean.
 - The beverage container should be made of clear materials to prominently display the chocolate.
- “The right dispenser allows the barista to efficiently show the beverage, serve it and sell it,” says Fletcher.**

MIXOLOGY: MILK OR WATER?

The directions for preparing artisan drinking chocolates vary between adding hot milk or water. Pre-conquest Americans used hot water because cows were introduced later by the Spanish. Milk can cut the flavor of the chocolate so that the beverage becomes liquid milk chocolate. Non-espreso drinkers will appreciate the rich, velvety sensation of drinking chocolate made with milk or heavy cream. Chocolatier Fran Bigelow recommends using milk or cream in the morning and water in the afternoon or evening.

CREATIVE USES

The success of the drinking chocolate category has spawned a host of delicious derivatives. Creative baristas and retail customers have stirred these chocolate mixes into libations, churned them into frozen desserts and battered them into baked desserts. As cocktails, these chocolates are natural companions with Frangelico, Amaretto, rum, brandy and flavored vodkas. During the summer, Jacques Torres makes frozen

hot chocolate to cool down his customers. He also blends his Hot Chocolate Classic with bananas, peanut butter or candied orange peel to make frozen chocolate frappés. Schokinag’s website contains summertime recipes for “Choc-sicles” and chocolate ice cream made with Extreme Dark Chocolate. One Schokinag customer reported fabulous success blending German Chocolate Cake with white cake batter.

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SOURCES

FS= food service/bulk
WH=wholesale program

ARTISAN PRODUCERS

Bissinger's Handcrafted Chocolatier:

Triple Chocolate European Drinking Chocolate, White Chocolate European Drinking Chocolate and Caribbean Spice European Drinking Chocolate.

WH
Contact: 800/325.8881 or bissingers.com.

Chocolat Moderne:

Snake Charmer Hot Chocolate, Madame 'X'tasy Hot Chocolate, Kama Sutra Hot Chocolate and Midnight Oasis Hot Chocolate.

WH
Contact: 212/229-4797 or chocolatmoderne.com.

Christopher Elbow:

Venezuelan Spiced Drinking Chocolate and Cocoa Noir Dark Drinking Chocolate.

WH
Contact: 816/842-1300 or elbowchocolates.com.

Chua Chocolate:

Maya Hot Chocolate and Abuela Hot Chocolate. **FS & WH**
Contact: 888/635-1444 or chuaochocolatier.com.

Dagoba:

Xocolatl, Hot Chocolate Authentic and Hot Chocolate Unsweetened (fair trade). All products are organic.

FS & WH
Contact: 541/482-2001 or dagobachocolate.com.

Fran's Chocolates, Ltd:

Premium Hot Chocolate.

WH
Contact: 206/322-0233 or franschocolates.com.

Garrison Confections:

Ultimate Hot Chocolate and Ultimate Spicy Hot Chocolate.

FS & WH
Contact: 401/490-2740 or garrisonconfections.com.

Jacques Torres:

Hot Chocolate Classic and Wicked Hot Chocolate.

FS & WH
Contact: 718/875-9772 or mrchocolate.com.

Kakawa Chocolate House:

Mesoamerican historic line: Acuyo, Aztec Warrior, Chili, Full Spice, Pepper Allspice and Rose Almond; European & American historic line: 1644 Spanish Chocolate, 1666 Tuscan Citrus Chocolate Elixir, 1666 Tuscan Jasmine Chocolate Elixir, 1692 French Chocolate Elixir, 1790s Jeffersonian American Chocolate Elixir and 1900s Oaxacan Mexican Chocolate Elixir.

WH
Contact: 866/982-0388 or kakawachocolates.com.

Knipschildt:

Chai Hot Chocolate & Coffee Stick, Mocha Hot Chocolate & Coffee Stick and Butterscotch and Whiskey Hot Chocolate & Coffee Stick.

WH
Contact: 203/849-3141 or knipschildt.com.

L.A. Burdick:

Milk Hot Chocolate, Dark Hot Chocolate and White Hot Chocolate.

FS & WH
Contact: 800/229-2419 or burdickchocolate.com.

Lake Champlain Chocolates:

Aztec Hot Chocolate, Chocolate Hot Chocolate, Mocha Hot Chocolate, New World Drinking Chocolate, Organic & Fair Trade Hot Chocolate, Old World Hot Chocolate and Unsweetened Cocoa. (The New World Drinking Chocolate contains shaved chocolate; the others use cocoa powder.)

FS & WH
Contact: 802/864-1808 or lakechamplainchocolates.com.

Linda Grishman Chocolates:

Vermont Hot Chocolate.

FS & WH
Contact: 800/862-5814 or vermontchocolate.com.

MarieBelle:

Aztec Hot Chocolate (63% cocoa), Aztec Dark Hot Chocolate (72%), Cafe Negro Hot Chocolate and Aztec Spicy Hot Chocolate (63%)

WH
Contact: 212/925-6999 or mariebelle.com.

Ricard Chocolate:

Made with 32% white chocolate: Lemon Grass White Chocolate, Almond Crème White Chocolate, Ginger Vanilla Bean White Chocolate, Mocha Vanilla White Chocolate, Malted Nutmeg White Chocolate, Fresh Mint White Chocolate, Anisette Biscotti Vanilla White Chocolate, and White Chocolate; made with 38% milk chocolate: Powdered Orange Rind Milk Chocolate, Hazelnut Gianduja Milk Chocolate, Malted Milk Chocolate, Chili Lime Milk Chocolate, Peppermint Milk Chocolate, and Mocha Milk Chocolate, Roasted Almond Crunch Milk Chocolate; made with 72% dark chocolate: Espresso infused Bittersweet Chocolate, Sugar Free Bittersweet Chocolate, Chili Lime Bittersweet Chocolate, Atkins

Approved Bittersweet Chocolate, Powdered Orange Rind Bittersweet Chocolate, Peppermint Bittersweet Chocolate, and Aztec Chili Bittersweet Chocolate.

FS

Contact: 212/673-2779 or ricardchocolat.com.

Scharffen Berger Chocolate Maker:

Drinking Chocolate.

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Contact: 510/981-4054 or scharffenberger.com.

Vosges Haut Chocolat:

Aztec Elixir Cocoa, Bianca Cocoa and La Parisienne Cocoa.

WH

Contact: 888/301-9866 or vosgeschocolate.com.

MANUFACTURERS

Bensdorp:

Choc-o-laté Robusto. This is a ready-to-serve chocolate packed in an aseptic Tetra pack

FS

Contact: 800/836-2626 or barry-callebaut.com.

Caffe D'Amore:

Mexican Spiced Cocoa, Chocolate Truffle, French Vanilla, Raspberry Parfait, White Chocolate, Caramel Praline, Holiday Spice and Orange Pecan. These products contain cocoa powder, not chocolate.

FS & WH

Contact: 800/999-0171 or sippingchocolate.com.

Guittard:

Dark Chocolate Syrup, Milk Chocolate Syrup and White Chocolate Syrup. These are liquid-based products.

FS & WH

Contact: 800/468-2462 or guittard.com.

Mont Blanc Gourmet:

Haut Chocolat. This is a liquid-based product.

FS & WH

Contact: 800/877-3811 or montblancgourmet.com.

Schokinag Chocolate:

Chocolate Mint Drinking Chocolate, Chocolate Mocha Drinking Chocolate, Dulce de Leche Drinking Chocolate, Extreme Dark Drinking Chocolate, German Chocolate Cake Drinking Chocolate, Moroccan Spice Drinking Chocolate, No Sugar Added Triple Chocolate Drinking Chocolate, Triple Chocolate Drinking Chocolate, and White Chocolate Drinking Chocolate.

These products contain chocolate shavings and cocoa powder.

FS & WH

Contact: 800/807-2465 or drinkyourchocolate.com.

Torani:

European Drinking Chocolate. This product uses chocolate shavings and cocoa powder.

FS & WH

Contact: 800/775-1925 or torani.com.

EQUIPMENT SUPPLIERS

Buffet Enhancements:

Chocolate Hot Shot.

Contact: 251/990-6199 or buffetenhancements.com.

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