

Chocolate Safari

Tasting Journal

coeur
de
Xocolat
The heart of Chocolate

A Guide to Chocolate Tasting

Confectionery is enjoyed. Great Chocolate is experienced. Chocolate can be mistaken to mean just one flavour and the only difference between good and bad chocolate is the price. But, just like a fine wine, chocolate boasts a symphony of delicate and intricate aromas and flavours that build to deliver a complete sensory experience.

This guide isn't meant to change the way you eat chocolate, it is designed to take you on a food adventure and develop your palate and therefore your chocolate experience allowing you to appreciate chocolate on another level using all your senses completely. There are many of factors that affect the flavours we experience in chocolate and what we taste is a very personal thing. This guide should provide you with the process, vocabulary and the tools to describe your experiences in your journal.

The following pages will walk you through some of the flavour factors such as varietal, the fermentation process, roasting, conching, blending, storage, cocoa percentage and inclusions.



Chocolate Buying Guide.

Historically, our choice of chocolate was mainly limited to milk, dark, white and ruby. More recently there has been an explosion of interest in new and more sophisticated chocolate with more refined origins and everything that come with it. Our fascination with where our food has come from has brought a wealth of single origin chocolate bars into the market and with the web there is now more information available to us than ever before.

So, before you splash out and buy your chocolate, look at the label. This will tell you a number of things about the bar. My advice is to treat your chocolate purchasing with the same respect you treat your wine or whiskey purchasing and let the information on the pack lead you. Ultimately it will let you know what to expect and whether it's likely to appeal to your preferences.

The cocoa percentage is really important to the overall experience but, just like with whiskey, that indicator shouldn't be taken in isolation. The percentage of cocoa content is often used as a barometer of quality. There can be fantastic quality 45% chocolate and equally you can get some poor quality 95% bars.

This guide will help you turn any bar of chocolate into a multi-sensory adventure.



Tasting the Five Senses

You're about to be taken on a Food Adventure through a chocolate sensory analysis so you can enjoy chocolate using all your senses.



Look –

Chocolate comes in many different shapes and varieties white, milk, dark, and ruby chocolate. Once you have made your decision it's down to the finer detail of the bar, what's been used to make it and how it's been handled throughout the production process. A good chocolate bar will communicate all its good points to us through the packaging to help us make our buying decisions, much like the tasting notes on wine.

Once we've paid out our money we can unwrap our bar and lay it in front of us - without touching it!

Look at the surface of the chocolate, what do you see? Now that you have stopped to pay attention you may notice the subtle colours which vary depending on the varietal of cocoa used.

- Dark chocolate: deep, intense mahogany hues

- Milk chocolate: auburn, dark violets and rustic reds
- White chocolate: yellow, butters and creams
- Ruby chocolate: pale pinks with a natural fruity note

Is it glossy or dull? Is it waxy or smooth? A well-tempered bar of chocolate should be shiny and smooth; anything other than this would indicate that something hasn't gone right in the production process or in storage.

Is there a white film across the surface? If yes, this is called a bloom which tells you that the bar has been exposed to extreme temperatures (hot or cold) that have separated the tight bond created during the tempering process. The cocoa mass and the cocoa butter are now separate from each other which can look unappetising although it is safe to eat it will have lost some of the mouth feel.



Touch

Now we move onto the touch phase of your experience; this phase is designed to start your connection with chocolate and to engage with the beautiful food.



Good chocolate should be dry on your finger tips and it should not feel sticky, gritty or waxy. Gently run your finger across the back of the bar and see how yours fares.

Now gently squeeze the corner. It should be firm to touch and it should start to melt slightly from the warmth of your fingers, chocolate starts to melt at 25c. You should see some residue left on your fingertips at this point.



Listen

We now listen to our chocolate; introducing more science into our experience.



Take your chocolate and hold it up to your ear, break it in two. You should hear a snap. That's the cocoa butter crystals, which were formed during the tempering process. If the bar has been tempered correctly the snap should ring clearly and not be a dull thud. As a rule, the higher the cocoa content the more pronounced the snap.

Smell

This is a really a key part of the process as between 70 - 90% of what we taste as flavour is attributed to aroma.



Not all chocolate will have an obvious smell, even when held up to your nose. To really get the aroma we need to isolate the olfactory system. Smell plays a key role in building the anticipation of what we're about to taste before we put it in our mouths. The aromas that can be found in chocolate are similar to those found in wine. So why haven't we noticed them before? Well until now you didn't have the right tools for the job.

Take a piece of chocolate and rub it between your thumb and forefinger so it starts to melt a little. Then place into your cupped hands and take a deep sniff through your nose and hold for a few seconds.



As you breathe out gently you should start to notice some of the subtle nuances that are held within the flavour of the chocolate. Use the flavour wheel in this booklet to identify some of them. There isn't a right or wrong way here. Taste is very personal and the wheel is just designed to map out some of

the terms and vocabulary used by experts.

Taste

Taste, this is the climax and most familiar part of the tasting process.



To really taste the chocolate we need to isolate our senses.

Breathe in and pinch your nose, place a small square of chocolate on the centre of your tongue close your mouth count to five. This takes away 90% of the taste attributed to the nose and emphasises the other 10% (sugar).

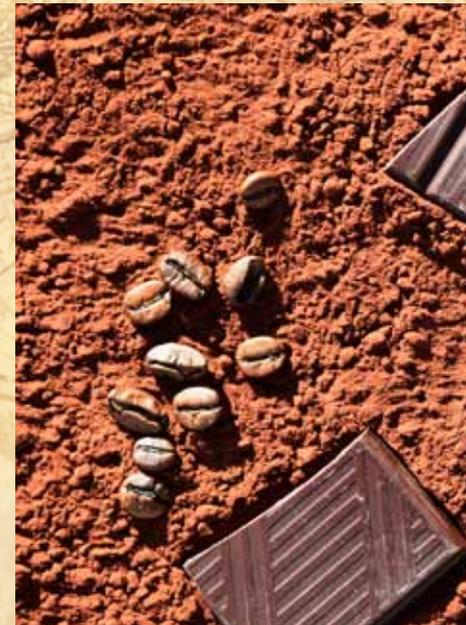
Finally, let go of your nose and draw in breath over the top of the chocolate through your teeth. This process is used in whiskey and wine tasting and is called 'cucking'. The idea behind this is that the air moves the aromas around the rest of your mouth and releases every last molecule of taste. Let it melt on the tongue, taste the

initial flavours, aromas and consistency. Gently rub your tongue against your palate. This causes the temperature of the chocolate to slowly increase, resulting in the final release of its flavours.

At each stage take your time and make a conscious effort to name the flavours you're experiencing. Record your sensations in the journal.

Aromas

There are a whole host of aromas to be found on your aroma wheel but the basic challenge is to look for sweetness, acidity, bitterness and astringency umami. A good chocolate should have a balance of these five attributes.



Taste



It should be smooth and buttery and melt into a creamy liquid bursting with unique flavours. A well-made chocolate will contain layers of flavour so that the individual aromas aren't fighting for focus. Concentrate on your tongue, feel, and savour the different flavours: first acidic, then if you wait a little longer you may experience the bitterness.

Taste again with a new piece of chocolate, but this time concentrate on your nose, to discover the aromas. Similar to wine, you will first smell the most volatile aromas (primary or head

aromas): These are instantaneous, fleeting flower or fruit aromas, which volatilize quickly and fade away during the middle of the tasting process.

Next, we move on to the aromas that are unveiled in



the middle of the tasting experience, known as body aromas. These are essentially hot aromas, like roasted almonds, hot bread crust, spice mix, etc. Allow yourself to linger over the taste experience, you should be able to savour the less volatile aromas of certain chocolates. These are often woody, roasted nibs (cocoa nibs), malty, etc.

Aftertaste

Another important element of the tasting process is the aftertaste (finish) different chocolates will have different finishes. What did you notice about the aftertaste? Did it linger? Was it gone within seconds of swallowing? Was it different to the initial flavour profile?

Some chocolate flavours can linger for up to 45 minutes so don't neglect this part of the process before moving on to the next sample piece.

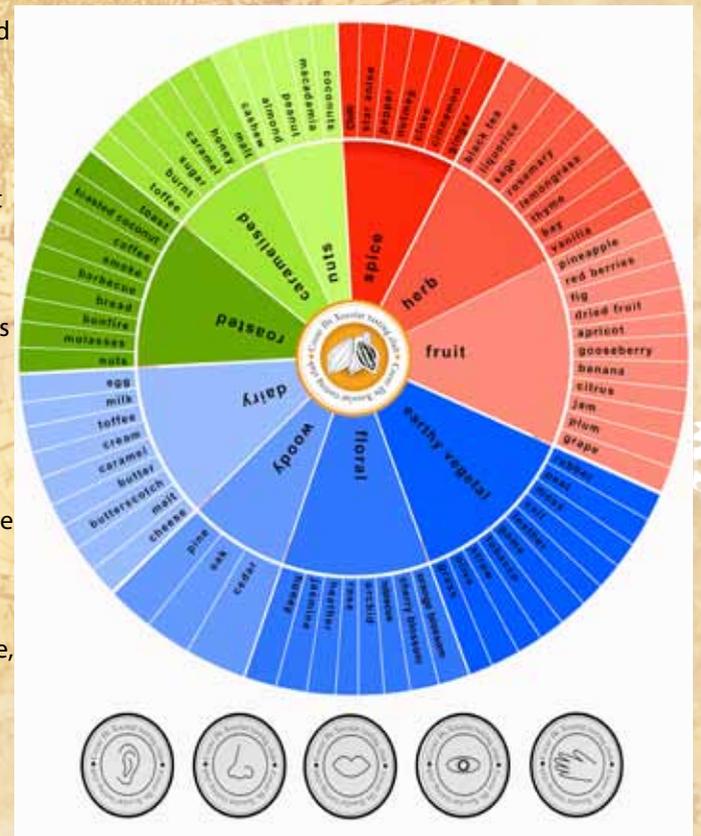
Aroma Wheel

The Coeur de Xocolat Aroma Wheel is the perfect way for chocolate lovers to get a look at the many aromas and flavours found in chocolate.

Each of these unique aromas found are due to the variety of beans being used in the production of the bar or bonbon, coupled with the soils and terroir or soil the beans were planted in and the choices made by the chocolatier. The information found on the aroma wheel will help you identify what you are seeing, feeling, hearing, smelling, and tasting.

The Aroma Wheel is divided into several sections to help you visualise the different flavours, scents and aromatic qualities found in most chocolates, regardless of the bean variety. The same aromatic complexities and sensations pictured on the aroma wheel are found in chocolate from all over the world, for example, if you taste something fruity in the chocolate, try to distinguish the type of fruitiness. Is it berry or citrus? If it's berry, what kind of berry? Is it blueberry

or strawberry? Initially tasters will experience what is known as primary aromas. These early scents come predominantly from the fruits, which include notes of berries, grape, cherry, strawberry, blackcurrant, blueberry, blackberry and black cherry in citrus, apple, pear, pineapple or other tropical fruits. Coffee, vanilla or oak chocolate notes as well as floral, stone, liquorice and jammy scents.



Tasting Other Types of Chocolate

The complete process you've just gone through will now allow you to get the full value from the world of chocolate. There are some subtle differences you should know about some types of chocolate.

Filled Chocolates

The taste element of the process will be slightly different. You should push the chocolate to the roof of your mouth and allow the chocolate to melt, as before. Then chew your chocolate a couple of times to release the filling and allow the flavours to blend with your melting chocolate. Enjoy the blend of flavours.

Taste in Order

Our taste buds and flavour receptors are very sophisticated and very good at what they do. However, it is important that we allow them to work at their optimal level, so if you're going to taste more than one chocolate, taste in order. If you taste out of order you may lose some of the subtleties contained within for example, if you've introduced a Dark Chocolate



with Chilli, a Milk Chocolate and Salted Caramel and a White Chocolate bar you should eat them in order of flavour potency: white, milk, dark. If you started with the chilli this would overpower any other flavour and distort your experience.

Judging Quality

Once you've been through this process a few times, people will ask what is your favourite type? This is almost impossible to answer. You can tell people which you find most intriguing or which is the most expensive. Any sensory experience is personal, we all have different tastes and appreciation of flavour. Some people get hung up on how 'sophisticated' their palate is and want to notice every flavour they are told they should notice but the reality is we all taste and experience differently. This guide isn't designed to give you a 'standard' rating system with which to 'score' the chocolate. However it is designed to help you experience chocolate differently and to give you the tools to decide which gives the best experience.

Organising your own Tasting Event

Make a Guest List

I suggest that you use small samples in your tasting, eg 4g This will be enough for you to appreciate the characteristics of each sample, but not enough to overwhelm your palate. Your guests want to be able to discuss the chocolates so keep the party relatively small. Instead of inviting all of your friends, bring together a dozen people or less who you think would enjoy sitting down and eating delicious chocolate. Remember, it doesn't take a lot of people to make an enjoyable evening. You might want to run your own chocolate tasting at work as a teambuilding or fundraising event.

Selecting the Chocolate

You can now visit most supermarkets and have a choice of different origins and % but if you feel adventurous visit your local chocolatier who will be able to advise you.

Buy a range of origins and % for contrast.

Research each chocolate on the company's website, try reading others reviews.

People love stories most companies will have information about the cocoa farmers and country of origin along with tasting and pairing notes on their website, is sometimes worth a read to help you to introduce each chocolate to the group. Let the aromas and flavours speak for themselves.





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