

Sacred Cacao

A NICE PAIRING

Wine and chocolate pairing is not an absolute science. Each taster will have a different palate sensation - the key is experimentation and deciding on your own personal preferences.

The principles are similar to other wine and food pairings. Lighter food flavours complement lighter styles of wines such as whites, sparkling and pinot noir, and richer foods go with full-bodied reds, such as cabernet sauvignon, syrah and nebbiolo.

There is an enormous diversity of chocolate available with varying levels of cacao, sugar, milk and fillings. All of these will affect the flavours. Dark, bitter-sweet chocolate, with cacao levels of 50 per cent to 60 per cent, will have more intense flavours. It pairs well with wines such as port, Banyuls from the south of France and fuller-bodied dry reds from varieties such as zinfandel, merlot, shiraz and grenache. These have high fruit concentration, lower acid and softer tannins.

Dow's, the famed port producer, has taken wine and chocolate pairing to another level and released a ruby style of port called Nirvana, a blend made to complement chocolate. Any ruby port will complement cheese for guests who do not enjoy chocolate.

For lighter styles of chocolate such as truffles, milk chocolate or fruit-flavoured chocolate, try wines made from muscat, a Tokaji or Sauternes.

For future romantic dates, if you are thinking of chocolate and sparkling wine, look for a sparkling which is slightly higher in sugar.

One perfect match is to pair a Moscato d'Asti with a chocolate flavoured dessert.

Sarah Wong

Chocolate lovers can now find many places to satisfy their cravings, says Vicki Williams

Chocolate has come a long way. Back in the day, milk chocolate was almost all you could get. That was mostly about the sugar, and had little to do with the cacao itself.

But chocolate connoisseurs now talk of genetics, terroir, aroma and flavour profile, much like wine experts. Tasting notes focus on engaging the five senses. Even touch is included, as a good chocolate bar should have a firm snap.

Modern chocolate companies look to distinguish their offerings by using terms such as artisanal, organic, fair trade, single origin and single plantation. The focus is on dark chocolate, as a quick sweep of high-end supermarkets makes clear: dark bars outnumber the milk.

Dark chocolate is also starting to be considered a health food, if eaten in moderation. That's because it's a source of antioxidant and has an impact on mood-enhancing serotonin levels. This latter quality may be the reason that some people refer to themselves as chocoholics who need a daily fix.

In Hong Kong, the chocolate fanatic is spoiled for choice. An increasing number of chocolatiers have set up shop, and brands that were once the preserve of professionals are now available to consumers. The city offers something for all tastes and budgets, as the following 10 chocolate indulgences highlight.

Fauchon

This Parisian brand was established in 1886. The company will open its first Hong Kong store, in Hysan Place, next month. It will offer eight macaron flavours (chocolate, vanilla, praline hazelnut, pistachio, raspberry, lemon, caramel and coffee), two chocolate ranges (with 17 flavours), and a selection of items that it calls gourmet gifts (foie gras, tea, mustard and honey) that are sourced from artisanal producers in France. The macarons and chocolates will be made in France and shipped to Hong Kong.

La Maison du Chocolat

La Maison du Chocolat has several outlets in the city where it sells individual chocolates, macarons, chocolate bars and ice cream. It also stocks limited-edition chocolate bars. Currently on offer is the Ile de Grenade, a 68 per cent cacao single origin chocolate bar with an intense taste, creamy texture and bursts of acidity and fruit. The experience



La Maison du Chocolat

intensifies with each piece. The 69 per cent Pariguan is a good alternative.

TCHO

Founded in 2005 in San Francisco by an ex-Nasa space shuttle vision systems developer and a 40-year veteran of the chocolate industry, and led by the co-founders of *Wired* magazine, TCHO has just arrived in Hong Kong. It describes its products in terms of flavour rather than focusing on percentage of cacao.