

Chocolate Lecture & Tasting

Everything You Always Wanted To Know About Chocolate But Never Thought To Ask

What are we tasting?

TEN chocolates, all excellent!

**FIVE varietal bittersweets, FOUR strong varietal milks, ONE white
...at least SEVEN countries: Philippines, Colombia, Tanzania, Peru, Ghana, Ecuador,
the Dominican Republic, and whatever's in the "Soie Blanche"**

WAIT. How are we getting actual chocolate? *After September 15*, you can go to
www.chocosphere.com and type CAMFT in the search box.

- You should see two products, CAMFT-BASIC and CAMFT-EXTRA. BASIC has seven chocolates, EXTRA has ten (the same seven, plus three).
- You can see my comments below on our chocolates, plus a few additional recommendations. •
DISCLAIMER: I have no financial connection to Chocosphere—just a happy frequent long-time customer. I am delighted that they have created this kit for us to purchase for our online chocolate-tasting, with consumer-size packets of top-quality items normally packaged for chefs.
- And we have a DISCOUNT CODE! If you spend \$50 and type CAMFT2020 in the discount box at checkout, you get \$5 off. (Note: gift certificates and warm-weather packaging won't count towards your \$50.)
- **Discount code is valid from September 15 to November 15**, one use per customer.
- **Our products are available from September 15 for as long as supplies last**, probably mid-November.

What if we don't buy the tasting kit? Certainly not required! You may find yourself seriously craving by the end of this presentation. Tasting kits remain available through mid-November, depending on supply. They are VERY SPECIAL. Chocosphere doesn't normally sell bulk chocolate in packets smaller than a kilo, and we're getting unique 50-gram packets. (*I'll explain why.*)

How much chocolate are we getting? Ten fifty-gram packets.
That's just over a pound. A lot of chocolate! If you live with six people, you have enough chocolate for everyone to taste everything. (I keep my chocolate in the freezer.)

What does 50 grams of chocolate look like? About one generous bite bigger than a standard Hershey bar (43 grams).

Here is a *fève* of the Nyangbo bittersweet (chocolate no. 7 in our list). It weighs about 3.75g, so you get about 12-13 of these:



And here is a *disc* of the Colombian Cordillera (chocolate no. 3 in our list). It weighs about 3g, so you get 16-17 in your packet.



That's quite a bit! But 50g is the smallest quantity we can get.

And even that is not normally purchase-able—Chocosphere is breaking up kilos for us!

So here's what's in our tasting kit.

1. Auro 64% Bittersweet Chocolate Couverture Coins. Auro is a relatively new company, bean-to-bar (that is, grown and processed/manufactured) in the Philippines. **Couverture** means it has extra cocoa butter. Rich, raisin-y taste. Slightly tangy, with rich pudding notes. *I love watching a new company that starts out delicious and continues upward.*

2. Auro 42% Milk Chocolate Couverture Coins. Same Filipino varietal beans as no. 1, but in a milk chocolate. *If this is the first time you've tasted single-origin high-cacao milk chocolate, give yourself some time to enjoy this intense experience.* And if think you don't like milk chocolate, give this a chance. Standard American milk chocolate candy is typically about 11% cacao. You do the math!

3. Cordillera 70% Bittersweet Discs. Colombian chocolate often has mocha/coffee notes. *I love this versatile chocolate—recently chopped some into a biscotti recipe.*

4. Cordillera 36% Milk Chocolate Discs. Mousse-y tasting! Same Colombian varietal cacao as no. 3.

5. República del Cacao 62% Bittersweet Buttons. Dominican varietal, Ecuadorian manufacturer; fruity notes.

6. Republica del Cacao 38% Milk Chocolate Buttons. Same manufacturer as no. 5, but a Peruvian varietal in a high-cacao milk chocolate.

7. Valrhona Nyangbo 68% Bittersweet Fèves. Ghanaian varietal (complex, earthy and intense; spicy notes), processed in France (*smooooooth!*). “Fèves” is the name of the shape, meaning “beans.” (Part of CAMFT-EXTRA, not in BASIC.)

8. Valrhona Alpaco 66.5% Bittersweet Fèves. Ecuadorian varietal (bright and fruity notes), processed in France. (Part of CAMFT-EXTRA, not in BASIC.)

9. Domori Morogoro 38% Couverture Discs. From the Kokoa Kamili co-op in the Kilombero valley of the Morogo region of Tanzania, processed in Italy. (Remind me to explain how knowing all those location details literally makes the chocolate taste better!) (Part of CAMFT-EXTRA, not in BASIC.)

10. Guittard “Soie Blanche” 35% Couverture Wafers. (Not wafers as in cookies; that’s the name of the shape.) “Soie Blanche” means “white silk.” *A high-cocoa-butter white chocolate!* The only blend we’re tasting today—that is, not single-origin varietal. Manufactured near San Francisco by a company that migrated from France for the Gold Rush.

Additional recommendations: see what else you can add to your order while watching to see if the shipping charge stays the same. • I love browsing around chocosphere.com and thinking I’m investing in new tasting experiments. • Here are a few favorites of mine:

Original Beans Cru Virunga (bittersweet 70%) and Femmes de Virunga (milk chocolate 55%). Both super-delicious. Cacao from the Congo, supporting women, gorillas, and trees; processed in Switzerland by a company headquartered in the Netherlands. • If you want to buy one delicious chocolate bar as a gift, either of these is a good choice (depending your preference for milk vs. dark chocolate).

Slitti Lattenero 70%: Literally “black milk,” a milk chocolate that’s as high-cacao as a bittersweet. *Kind of weird, but I love it.* Tastes as if you were dreaming about chocolate pudding and you wake up and the aftertaste stays with you all day.

Hachez Maracaibo Milk Bar 55%. Venezuelan varietal processed in Germany. Surprisingly mild for such a strong chocolate, and about half the price of other chocolates. (*I don’t know why. It’s excellent chocolate!*)

Need a (half-)kilo block for baking, confections, whatever?

Click “Product Type” and choose “Chef,” then “Block.” I recommend Guittard’s Complexite and Kokoleka (Hawaiian! Both milk and dark), and other brands there look promising too. • A kilo of chocolate is about the size of a laptop.

• **May I buy an extra tasting kit for my friend?** Absolutely.

Tasting Notes: Is Chocolate The New Wine?

• **Bittersweet** is best for judging the original cacao. Our bittersweets today are relatively matched around 70%. If it's *Couverture*, it has extra cocoa butter. • **Strong milk chocolates** (\geq c. 40% cacao) are trending. Baking chocolate (99-100% cacao) is intended for combining with other ingredients. Sweeter chocolates are already masked by other ingredients. Imagine that you're going inside the chocolate to taste its backstage elements.

Chocolate contains over 600 aromatic compounds (according to Harold McGee, *On Food and Cooking* [Scribner, 2004]; others say fewer), equivalent to fine wine, coffee, and tea.

Chocolate-tasting guides emphasize using your five senses:

SIGHT: color and gloss

SOUND: the only aspect of a chocolate tasting you can experience online! It should snap when you crack it (Nina says: as a musician I'm a professional sound-person. It took me a while to learn to listen to my chocolate for clues to texture and freshness.)

SMELL: pure, chocolaty—not waxy, not rancid, no off odors, and not smelling like its wrapper (unless that gives you a nostalgia rush for paper- or foil-wrapped chocolate from your childhood). Professional chocolate tasters rub the chocolate between thumb and index finger to warm it up and release volatile elements.

TOUCH: texture, surface, melting character and mouthfeel.

TASTE: balance of acid, bitter, and sweet. I like to think in terms of combining flavor notes. I have tasted chocolate that suggests fruit, wine, citrus, plum, bean, ash (not good!), dust (worse!), charcoal (okay as part of a larger spectrum; think balsamic vinegar), wood (again, think of balsamic vinegar), coffee, spice, caramel, dried fruit, cooked fruit, pipe tobacco, herbs, grass, mushrooms, rich soil, earth, butter, cream, almonds or other nuts, flowers, tea. More descriptors—good and bad—from *Cook's Illustrated* magazine, February 2005 (feature on Dutch-process cocoa powder): balanced, full, fudgy, toasty, chalky, canned, metallic, fake, cheesy, plastic, hot dog/sausagey, burnt, woody, smoky, hammy, raspberry, molasses, corn, horseradish, nutty. My latest (bad): lipstick? crayon?

Online sources for chocolate and information:

- **chocosphere.com:** our supplier today; chocolate from dozens of companies.
- **scharffenberger.com:** possibly America's best chocolate; a fascinating and intelligent company. Find essays at this site to reassure about political correctness in chocolate, plus a virtual factory tour. I buy Scharffen Berger chocolate from chocosphere.
- **guittard.com:** also a strong contender for America's best chocolate. I buy my Guittard from chocosphere. Guittard offers varieties and blends.
- **chocolates-elrey.com:** my source for Icoa (extraordinary white chocolate) and Caoba; also try their Anniversario.
- **madewithmolecules.com:** where I bought my theobromine necklace (disclaimer: I found this site and bought a necklace; no financial connection).

ALLERGIES: most chocolate has traces of nuts. *Exception: Guittard! You can find Guittard's Allergen Policy Letter at guittard.com/allergen-statement.* **Other allergens:** traces of milk and soy proteins in all samples.

POLITICALLY CORRECT: Some politically correct chocolates have begun to taste extremely good. ORIGINAL BEANS (Netherlands company, manufactured in Switzerland) and FELCHLIN (Switzerland) take both taste and process seriously.

Recipe hints—my opinionated opinions:

Chocolate melts in your mouth. Think about how low a temperature that is; it actually melts at a slightly lower temperature. If you need to melt chocolate for a recipe, remember that extra heat doesn't do it any good, and probably mutes some of the subtle flavor notes (especially with milk or white chocolate). Once the chocolate is about half melted, you can probably melt the rest off the heat just by stirring. Remember that you are *melting* the chocolate, not cooking it.

Do the original ingredients taste better without being put into the recipe?

Read the ingredients before buying chocolate chips. There is a reason that they are often cheaper by weight than chocolate bars: many are loaded with solid non-chocolate fats to help them keep their shape. (Not all, though: read the ingredients!)

Wear whatever reading glasses you need to see whether an ingredient list says “vanilla” or “vanillin.” I think vanillin makes chocolate taste slightly like pickles. While it is the principal phenolic aromatic compound in real vanilla, there are 200 other volatile compounds in vanilla beans. Synthetic vanillin comes from coal tars or pine sapwood. My big disillusionment with my chocolate consciousness-raising has been to see that some of the well-known European chocolate companies use vanillin. *Even ickier:* they use vanillin in what the export to the U.S., but real vanilla for what you buy in Europe. *And the latest, ickiest revelation:* research chemist Mayu Yamamoto at the International Medical Centre of Japan has figured out how to extract vanillin from lignin in cow dung through a heating and pressuring process. Her research sponsor, Sekisui Chemical, promises not to use it in food. It may land in shampoo and scented candles.

Try to taste European chocolates in their native country—not the rubbery, waxy versions they export to American tastes. Fazer milk chocolate *in Finland* is a life-changing experience.

Do I recommend today's chocolates for cooking with? It's not worth getting expensive chocolate if you're going to mix it with other ingredients or cook at a temperature that masks or removes subtle flavor notes. On the other hand, Guittard and El Rey in large blocks (200g to 5 or 10 kilos!) are marvelous chocolates at a reasonable price! Both companies have many varieties. I like Trader Joe's Pound Plus bars—the 72% and the milk chocolate. Very present flavor—doesn't seem as if anything is between you and the full chocolate taste.

Outrageously Simple Chocolate Recipes

Hot Chocolate *as opposed to hot cocoa, which is what you make with cocoa powder*

Adapted from *Pure Chocolate* by Fran Bigelow with Helen Siegel (New York: Broadway Books, 2004)

3/4 cup milk or water (organic milk is a worthwhile luxury for this)
2 ounces bittersweet chocolate, chopped fine

Bring the milk or water to a simmer over medium heat. Remove from heat and whisk in chocolate for about a minute until smooth. Can be done in microwave if you watch carefully to make sure it doesn't erupt.

Iced Chocolate: make **Hot Chocolate**, above, and pour into a glass of ice.

Magic Chocolate Ice Cream Adapted from *Cook's Country*, June/July 2009, and found several places online. Doesn't need an ice cream machine! Makes about a quart.

1 teaspoon instant coffee or espresso powder
1 tablespoon hot water
4 ounces bittersweet chocolate, chopped (I recommend Trader Joe's 72% Pound Plus)
1/2 cup sweetened condensed milk
1/2 teaspoon vanilla extract (I recommend Trader Joe's Madagascar bourbon vanilla)
Pinch salt
1 1/4 cups heavy cream, cold

1. MELT CHOCOLATE BASE: Dissolve coffee or espresso powder in hot water. Microwave chocolate and sweetened condensed milk with coffee mixture, stirring every 10 seconds. Stir in vanilla and salt. Let cool.
2. MIX AND FREEZE Whip cream to soft peaks. Whisk 1/3 of whipped cream into cooled chocolate mixture. Fold remaining whipped cream into chocolate mixture until incorporated. Freeze in airtight container until firm.

Chocolate Balsamic Vinegar Adapted from *Real Chocolate* by Chantal Coady (New York: Rizzoli, 2003).

1/2 cup sugar (*Coady says superfine, but since you simmer it, regular will dissolve too*)
7 tablespoons vinegar (*Coady recommends equal parts cider vinegar and inexpensive balsamic vinegar*)
1 ounce bittersweet chocolate (approximately 70% cacao), finely chopped

Bring the sugar and vinegar to a simmer in a small saucepan over medium heat, stirring until the sugar dissolves. Continue to simmer about 5 minutes.

Remove from heat, whisk in the chocolate thoroughly, and leave to cool. When cool, stir again. Store in a small jar. This has a long shelf life, though you should stir it again before using. **Crazy idea:** a generous splash of this in sparkling water over ice is (sort of) like a very-low-calorie substitute for a chocolate ice cream soda.