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Diva



## The art of chocolate tasting

by Cynthia Loh

Mel Gibson was once quoted as saying: "After about 20 years of marriage, I'm finally starting to scratch the surface of that one. And I think the answer lies somewhere between conversation and chocolate. "

One reason why women enjoy chocolate so much comes from the myriad of tastes - from sweet to bittersweet, rich to refreshing - that it offers, not to mention the feel-good sensations that come from consumption!

As our taste buds become more accustomed to the good stuff in life, it is entirely possible to enjoy chocolate like you would enjoy wine.

For the female who wants to get more out of her chocolate treat, Diva shows you how to distinguish fantastic chocolate with some tips picked up from a recent chocolate master class held at Jones the Grocer with Italian boutique chocolate maker, Amadei.

### Looking out for good chocolate

According to Miss Karen Massuer, ambassador for Amadei, your senses should be put to good use to clue you into a piece of well-made chocolate.

**Sight:** Start by unwrapping the chocolate from its package and looking for chocolate with a lustrous colour and silky-smooth surface. The chocolate's surface should not be coated with chocolate dust, or any dusty particles.

**Sound:** When putting the chocolate into your mouth, the chocolate square should break with a crisp snap.

**Smell:** A first whiff of the chocolate should convey notes of sweetness, but breathing in deeply and holding the perfume in your nose should convey a more bitter note.

**Taste:** Good chocolate should have a rich taste, but does not leave a powdery, dusty feeling in your throat. You should also be able to detect a complex roster of tastes and aromas, depending on the variety of beans that were chosen to make the chocolate.

A white chocolate will have a rich buttery taste, while milk chocolate should have scents of butter and vanilla.

Dark chocolates are made with the basic ingredients cocoa mass (or cocoa liquor, which is the paste that comes out after the cocoa beans are ground into paste), sugar and vanilla. Depending on the variety of beans used, you will be able to detect a range of tastes that span from floral, to tobacco, to nuts and even slightly alcoholic notes.

### How to taste chocolate:

Tasting chocolate can be a highly individual experience. When you take a small bite of chocolate, chew it one to two times, then let it melt in your mouth. Tasting notes are the different flavors in chocolate such as wine, flowers, fruit, butter, coffee etc. This does not mean the chocolate maker has added extra ingredients, but these flavours are brought out when the cocoa bean is transformed into chocolate, in a process called that is known as "from bean to bar".

Percentage of cocoa in your chocolate - Many people have the idea that a higher percentage of cocoa in their chocolate bars means that it must be better. Not necessarily so, says Amadei's brand ambassador, Miss Karin Maasuer. While a chocolate with 70 per cent cocoa does have more chocolate than one with 50 per cent, whether it tastes good lies in the cocoa beans that are used to make the chocolates. And beans harvested in

### About Amadei

Amadei was started in 1998 by maitre chocolatier Cecilia Tessieri and her brother Alessio, with a small workshop and a single employee. The pair soon went into making their own chocolate to produce to their own chocolate products, giving the company complete control from the harvesting of the beans to the making of the chocolate.

This was because Cecilia wanted to make the "best chocolate in the world", but found that she was unable to do so as her chocolate was purchased from cocoa bean suppliers.

You may not have heard of Amadei in Singapore yet, but this Italian chocolate maker has been supplying their chocolates to fine hotels and restaurants, such as five-star Relais Santa Croce in Florence, the Bulgari Hotel, and some of New York's famous restaurants like Bernadin, Cafe Gray, the Park Hyatt in Tokyo and Heston Blumenthal's restaurant the Fat Duck.

different countries have different tastes.

Useful terms to know when tasting chocolate:

The process of turning cocoa into chocolate is important in making sure that the chocolate turns out tasty. These terms are used to describe the process -

**Roasting** - This takes place in an oven with indirect heat. This first stage of roasting brings out the aroma of the cocoa beans.

**Hulling** - Here is where the beans go into a machine that uses jets of compressed air to separate shells and sediments from the nib inside the cocoa fruit.

**Grinding** - This is the next stage after hulling. The cocoa paste is ground into cocoa mass.

**Blending** - Ingredients are mixed and blended together in heated areas.

**Refining** - The mixture that is obtained from blending is processed to become a very smooth liquid.

**Conching** - One of the most important steps in creating quality chocolate. This stage removes moisture and volatile acids to develop the aroma of chocolate, resulting in a liquid chocolate blend that has a very smooth texture.

**Tempering** - This stage crystallises the cocoa butter in the liquid chocolate, at which point, the chocolate is poured into moulds to assume its final shape, or is used to fill chocolates and truffles.

How to make a white chocolate and pistachio tiramisu

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