

Chocolate

by Phyllis Ann Marshall

The best medical news in history...
Chocolate is healthy.

Faith Popcorn, how right you were to coin the word "Foodaceuticals", for foods that heal. Our list has grown from the likes of broccoli, blueberries, and steel cut oats to exciting items like red wine...with chocolate the latest breakthrough. Just imagine...chocolate is gonna' fix what ails you! Got high blood pressure? Try a truffle. Worried about heart disease? Buy a bon-bon says the Medical News. And as a bonus, chocolate is a potent antioxidant. But, not so fast. It's not any old chocolate...

Of course there are rules. The operative words are "dark" and "bittersweet" not milk, light, or white. And moderation is the key. 2 to 3 oz./day is the prescription with a high percentage of cacao. What we need to know is that dark chocolate produces endorphins and actually contains very little caffeine...about as much as one cup of decaffeinated coffee. Premium chocolate with the right credentials also contains essential trace elements and nutrients such as iron, calcium, and potassium as well as vitamins A, B1, C, D, and E, says What's Cooking America.

Allow me just a bit of nostalgia for my sinful past when chocolate was pure decadence before we welcome the changes this healthy trend will create. I remember when Marcel Desaulniers of The Trellis Restaurant in Williamsburg, Virginia first created his delicious "Death by Chocolate" Cake. For years we had fun coining words like "divinely decadent", "devil's food", and "sinfully sensuous" to titillate the senses and activate the chocolate lovers to action with desserts on our menus.

Executive Pastry Chef Michelle Bracken of Zov's Bakery and Bistro in Tustin continues to produce her famous "Bombe" a heavenly concoction of dark and milk chocolate with a crème brulee filling while Rachel Klemek in her secret laboratory at the BlackMarket Bakery creates her "Widow's Tart", a dark chocolate and



caramel layered marvel in some of the best pie crust in O.C. sold retail at Farmer's Markets and wholesale to caterers and restaurants. Over the years the popular flourless chocolate cake which took us into the world of serious dark chocolate evolved into the molten chocolate cake oozing warm liquid chocolate on many menus. What an opportunity to create a signature dessert with a premium dark chocolate with major pedigree.

FoodPower predicts that chefs, pastry chefs and food savvy restaurateurs with an eye to sales will reconfigure their dessert menus to have some fun with this new/old trend. Here are some tips to fire the imagination:

1. Callebaut, the company of choice by many pastry chefs, provides a huge variety of quality chocolate with all of the various percentages of cacao. Barry Callebaut will open his \$20m state-of-the-art Chocolate Factory and Academy in the Napa Valley this year offering classes and technical help to support our growing habit.

2. Chocolate Lovers who for years have abstained are eating dark chocolate in moderation according to the rules and milk

and white chocolate lovers are shifting from the sweet and learning to appreciate the bitter...something like moving from an American cup of coffee to an espresso. See's dark chocolate Candy sales this past Christmas were substantially higher than in the past.

3. Chocolate like coffee and wine has an infinite depth and variation of character creating a curious fascination for serious connoisseurs, Experts are now debating the merits of beans from Sao Tome, Madagascar, Santo Domingo, Venezuela, Papua New Guinea and even Cuba. Like coffee and wine, the best beans are highly allocated and the rare crops are snapped up.

4. As with coffee, a new language for chocolate is emerging. Single origin bars with the rare criollo or trinitario beans listed are in demand and provide the top pedigrees. Also listed is the percent of cacao ranging from 60 to 99%, the higher the percent the more difficult to work with. Pastry Chef Shelley Register says, "You really need to know what you are doing to work with some of these chocolates as they react differently in recipes".

5. Europe is still Mecca for chocolate

with names like: Amedei and Domori in Italy, Michel Chaudun's, Cluizel's, DeBauve & Gallais, Christian Constant, and Jean-Paul Hevin in Paris, Dolfin in Belgium.

To contact or order all can found on Google. A very informative article on "the only 149 chocolates you need to know about" by Christine Muhlke is in The Choco Luxe Guide which can be found on the web.

6. Wine and Chocolate pairings will add some fun to our dining this year. CocoaVino, a new company in New York run by a Pastry Chef and a Master Sommelier, promotes organic chocolate and wine. This will work well for restaurants with all of the half bottles of wine becoming available. Shiraz when paired with dark chocolate produces a taste reminiscent of the richest chocolate cake.

7. America is tempering its way to equality with contenders like Steve Devries of Denver Colorado, Eric Girerd at Brooklyn Chocolate in New York, Richard Donnelly in Santa Cruz, Fran's Chocolates in Seattle, Guittard from the Bay Area is the secret to the good value of See's Candies that uses "Guittard couverture" to coat their candy. And Alice Waters, founder of Chez Panisse loves Scharffen Berger for Slow Food to make a rich, earthy, single-varietal chocolate. It is produced by sustainable and organic methods, using nacional cacao in various percents, a descendant of the cacao trees cultivated by the Mayans (who believed in its health aspects) and found only in Ecuador.

8. Liquid chocolate was hot all this year. Starbucks featured it, Christmas gifts were collections of cocoas, but it is the Chuao Chocolatier right here in Irvine at the Spectrum with headquarters in Encinitas that has the most provocative. Two flavors...Abuela Hot Chocolate, a silky thick blend of Venezuelan hot chocolate and my hands down favorite, the Spicy Maya with a warm chili chocolate finish.

9. I can't wait to taste the fun our talented chefs create with this trend. Allen Greeley kicked off the New Year with a Bitter Chocolate Pot de Crème and Cathy Thomas, Food Writer for the Register, unearthed Serendipity 3's secret Frozen Hot Chocolate dessert recipe which contains Scharffen Berger Bittersweet, Valhrona (72%) or Dove Dark.

We're in for great health in 2006. ☒

THE SPICE RACK



with Chef Gabriel Caliendo

Sofrito

Sofrito is a traditional seasoning comprised of onions, garlic, bell peppers, and cilantro, however, there are many different versions of this "Sabor" enhancer; many passed down through the generations. Sofritos are used to season anything and everything and are not generally spicy but instead, full flavored.

Sofrito is derived from the Spanish word "defreir" which means "To Fry." The savory blend originated in Spain and was brought to the Caribbean by the Conquistadors, spreading to Puerto Rico, Cuba, and The Dominican Republic.

There are two types of sofrito: a red and a green. The red sofrito is one that has tomatoes and a green sofrito, also referred to as simply recaon (another name for culantro), has no tomato and relies on large amounts of fresh herbs. Culantro, also known as tooth grass, long coriander, recaon, or ngogai, tastes similar to cilantro but with a much stronger flavor. In Puerto Rico, a small sweet pepper called "aji dulce" is also used instead of bell peppers. Other ingredients commonly used for both red and green sofritos might be: oregano, annatto seeds or achiote paste, salt pork, ham, cloves, cinnamon, and bay leaf.

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