

Getting Serious About Chocolate :: Hotel Chocolat

by Megan Bedford
EDGE Contributor
Monday Nov 30, 2009



Hotel Chocolat's new digs on Newbury Street in Boston opened in October.

 [EMAIL](#)  [PRINT](#)  [SHARE](#)

Most of us eat chocolate, but do we really taste it? That's the question Nicki Doggart of **Hotel Chocolat** asked as she lead me to the tasting room at the back of their flagship American store, which opened in Boston earlier this fall. The room is adorned with burlap bags of cocoa beans, marigold-toned cocoa pods, and the nicked and tarnished tools used to harvest their crops at St. Lucia's Rabot Estate.

At the center of the tasting room is a long wooden table where the chocolatier's finest are showcased for private parties of up to eight. Like wine, guests compare their four varieties of 72% chocolate - each a vintage representing a particular harvest and location; even better, guests taste them with wine. Luxe to luxe, Hotel Chocolat has partnered with [L'Espalier](#) on pairings, and chocolate-inspired cuisine.

Back to the question at hand, I was forced to admit my own guilt. In fact, I had only moments ago wolfed down the milk chocolate sample offered to everyone who enters the store. I sheepishly confessed, but recalled to Nicki that it hadn't left that yucky mouth feeling that most milk chocolates do - most milk chocolates being cloyingly sweet and full of strange ingredients like "palm oil." She smiled and let me in on a little secret - theirs is a 40% milk chocolate, which means it has a higher percentage of cocoa than many of the big name, commercial dark chocolates.

Cocoa content in Hotel Chocolat's milk chocolate is evidence of their "no nasties policy." (Did I mention they were British?) This is a policy pertaining to the integrity of their product, and the quality of their ingredients. Though they do not align themselves to groups such as Fair Trade nor do they have organic designation, the powers that be at Hotel Chocolat abide by an internal meter of goodness. While this sort of policy might raise a few eyebrows, it seems there is a good deal of evidence in their favor.

One measure of their authenticity is something they call "bean to bar." Similar to a single-estate vineyard, Hotel Chocolat grows much of the cocoa that goes into their products - a rare fact for most chocolatiers. "We decided to turn back the clock," describes founder Angus Thirlwell of his decision in 2006 to buy then deteriorating Rabot Estate in St. Lucia and make it a "center of cocoa leadership on the island." The decision not only revitalized the Rabot Estate, it also had a positive impact on all of the island's farmers.

Although the West Indies had been a major cocoa producer in the early 1900s, market demands have over the years forced poor working conditions on farmers and made it an industry that no longer provides people with livable wages. Through Hotel Chocolat's "Engaged Ethics Program" Hotel Chocolat has guaranteed the purchase of all of St. Lucia's cocoa at 40% over market value, and farmers receive payment within a week. And they are doing similar work in other parts of the globe to renew sustainable cocoa farming that not only supports farmers - it also provides them with a high-end product.

One great example of their work is their "Purist" collection; these are bars made from single estate cocoa harvests. Four of the seven in the collection are 72% dark chocolate, and each is distinct. My favorite is their *Organic Dark 72% with Chili and Pink Peppercorns* from Hacienda lara Plantation in Ecuador (\$10). Delicious and complex, the flavors of chili and peppercorns pair perfectly with the rich, dark chocolate. I love their set of these seven bars,

simply packaged as **The Library** (\$70), which makes a classy gift for foodies.



Perfect for the holidays...

The gifting doesn't stop there- Hotel Chocolat is full of options. The biggest, most luxurious of their giftables is the "truly epic" **Chocolatier's Table** (\$220), a collection of 125 chocolates neatly packaged in a box made to look like... well, a table. Difficult to describe, this is the sort of chocolate box that trumps all others, and is perfect for that certain someone you're looking to impress.

I also love their *Slab* bars (\$35), which also are huge and beautiful (10 x 6 inches). The premise to these one-pound bars is that they mimic the organic shape of molten chocolate when it is poured onto a chocolatier's table. While these slabs are molded, each is uniquely marbled and patterned. Flavors include Triple Chocolate Wham Bam Slab, Rocky Road, and Lemon & Ginger Dark. Mini Slabs are also available in **Carry Me Home** cases with ten varieties.

But that's just the tip of the iceberg. I love the Hotel Chocolat store in Boston for their walls of truffles and treats, starting at \$5. (Did I mention that they also support self-gifting?) Although there are rumors that a second Hotel Chocolat store will soon be opening elsewhere in America, for now non-Bostonians can give into their cocoa cravings by shopping online at www.hotelchocolat.com. While not every product is available, the big hitters - including holiday packages - can likely tide over most cocoaphiles until the brand expands. As for me, I'm off to the kitchen to fight the winter blues with a mug of Chili Dark Chocolate *Liquid Chocolate* - and yes, you can find it online.

Visit Hotel Chocolat online: www.hotelchocolat.com

Or in Boston:

Hotel Chocolat
141A Newbury Street
617 391 0513

[Click here for more on Hotel Chocolat's Rabot Estate](#)

Megan Bedford is a freelance food, drink, and travel writer. At a young age her mother told her, "food is love," and she took it to heart. She invites your comments at: mbedford@edgepublications.com.

COMMENTS

"Getting Serious About Chocolate :: Hotel Chocolat"