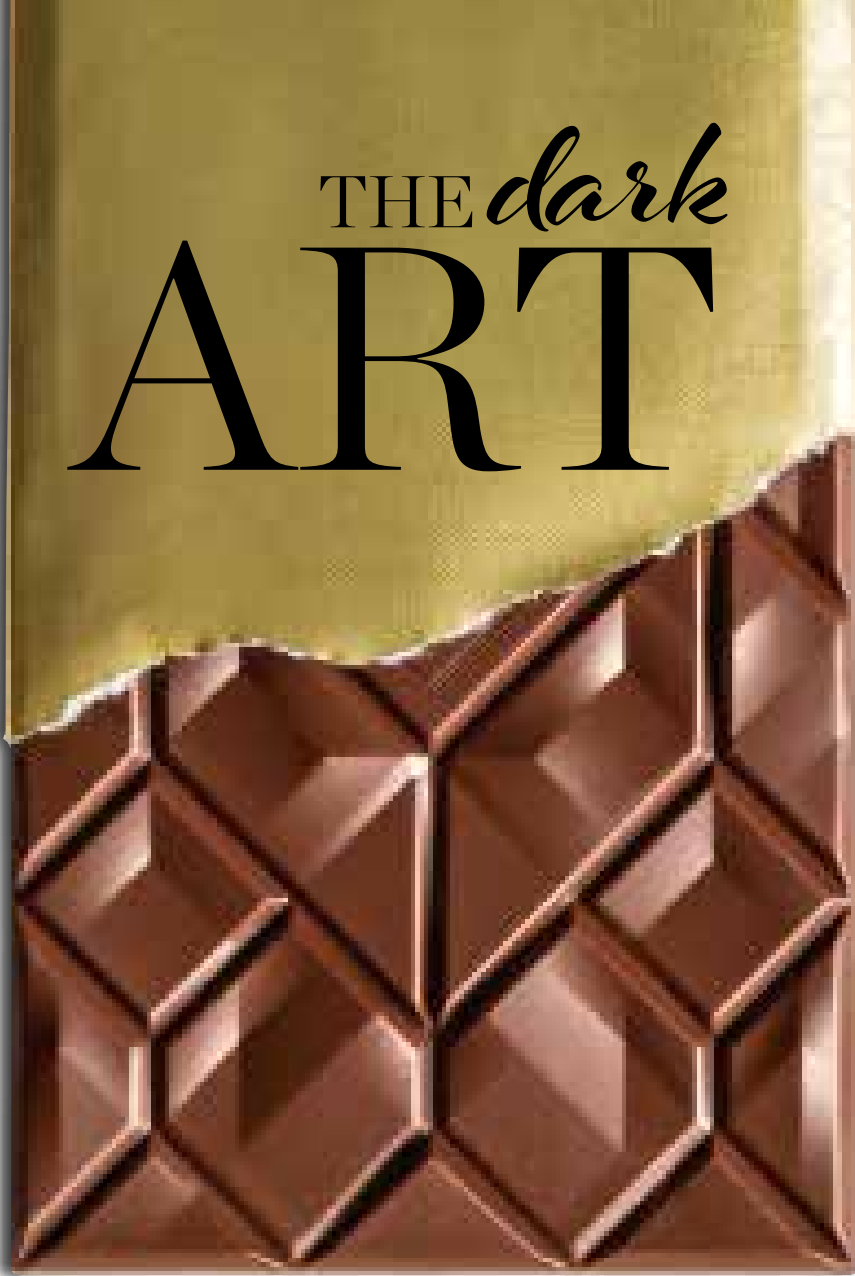


THE *dark* ART

The chocolate industry is in boom. More brands are investing in every stage of the production process, creating an industry with quality and flavour at its core. Sara Jayne Stanes, chief executive of Royal Academy of Culinary Arts and Chairman of Academy of Chocolate, takes you from bean to bar and beyond



It's a fine time to be a lover of chocolate. The increase in curiosity surrounding the industry has been an acorn to oak tree effect in the past few years. When my own passion for chocolate started 30 years ago, it was a struggle to find like-minded people who shared my taste. The word 'chocolate' referred to confectionery that bears little or no resemblance to what is out there today. It was milk, white and dark (in that order) and all of it mass-produced. As the interest in the likes of coffee and wine has burgeoned, chocolate has followed in its artisan footsteps. The internet and social media has played a big part in increasing knowledge,

but there is still a great deal of rubbish out there – both to buy and read. These days there are a better proportion of very good chocolates, and the UK is beginning to play its part. There was a 72 per cent rise in premium chocolate products between 2011 and 2015 and a 63 per cent increase in the number of artisan chocolatiers in the 12 months between 2015 and 2016. Our appetite for quality is growing.

You'll be familiar with 'artisan' as a descriptor for production of handmade food products such as bread, cheese and preserves. Though when applied to chocolate, artisan best describes the new bean-to-bar makers that have sprung up in profusion across

the US over the past ten years and now in the UK, albeit in small numbers. Bean-to-bar production is a financially intensive and time-consuming business and as such, the price point reflects this. Those who farm cacao have an idiosyncratic culture and the process needs expertise to get it right. Having visited several plantations over the years, I've had first-hand experience of the back-breaking work that goes into farming good cacao and it is not for the faint-hearted. The long history of chocolate demonstrates the impact that it had had on many Central and South American – and now African and Far Eastern – civilisations who have

revered it through religion, health and, of course, pleasure.

Single-bean chocolate has been promoted to market chocolate in a similar way to fine wines, where all beans come from the same estate, in a similar guise to single-estate wine. There is certainly a degree of interest in single bean, but the resulting flavours in chocolate depend mainly on the processes applied in its production and there are a huge number of variables. At every stage, the taste is affected. There are three main varieties of cocoa beans – criollo, forastero and trinitario – and from this family there are hundreds of hybrids that impact how chocolate looks, smells and tastes. —➔



BEAN-TO-BAR PROCESS

STAGE 1

The phrase means exactly what it suggests: a chocolate-maker that oversees every step of the process. The quality and variety of the beans are crucial from the very start, as is the fermentation at source to develop the complexity of flavours and soften the astringency of the finished product. Cocoa is first picked and at the raw stage you can expect to taste hedgerow berries, plums, raspberries as base notes. On top of this you might find herbal, grassy notes, with citrus, tobacco, sandalwood, earth and tree bark. It is estimated that the bean itself contains over 300 flavour compounds and 400 different aromas.

STAGE 2

Once picked and selected the beans are dried and shipped from the hot and steamy climates of the cacao plantations to the factory, which is usually in the cooler northern parts of the world such as Europe or North America for grading, roasting and winnowing (removal of the outer skin of the bean) to reveal the seeds or the nibs. These are then crushed and ground to a paste and mixed with sugar (and milk powder for milk chocolate), which is called a dough. The dough is then refined to reduce all the particles and make them imperceptible on the tongue, which gives that glorious silky sensation on the palate.

STAGE 3

The next part of this journey is conching, which is essential for finesse and smoothness as it homogenises and emulsifies the chocolate – a key differential that affects its flavour profile. The friction of the giant paddles that mix the chocolate, creates heat and melts all components so it becomes liquid. The first concher was made by Lindt in 1880 and the paddles were shaped like shells, hence the name ‘conche’. There is some difference of opinion about the best length of time for conching. For my palate, the longer the better – sometimes 72 hours – but others say that this loses the complex flavours so a shorter time is favourable.

STAGE 4

The final stage is tempering. To pass from a liquid to a solid state the chocolate goes through a temperature cycle. From 40-45C, it then cools to 27-28C and is reheated to 29-30C for milk chocolate and to 31-32C for plain. This is precisely calculated to encourage stable crystallisation of the cocoa butter and its dispersal through the chocolate. The different fats in cocoa butter crystallize at six different temperatures and need to be brought together for harmony and that glossy smooth finish. Tempering encourages and amalgamates fats to form crystals, which give a high gloss and rounded flavour.

THE NEW GUARD

The Academy of Chocolate was founded in 2005 to promote a greater awareness of the difference between fine chocolate and mass-produced chocolate confectionery and to encourage consumers to look beyond the label. For its first awards back in 2005, there were 12 entries. Twelve years on, there were over 900. Chocolat Madagascar won this year's coveted Golden Bean award for its 100 per cent product.

There are many companies around the world who are taking the consumer's new knowledge seriously. They include Amedei from Italy; Amano from the America; Valrhona, the French firm that has led the way on so

many chocolate trends; Chocolat Madagascar; Domori from Italy; and Cluizel from France to name a few. Akesson's (now in London) and Amsterdam-based Original Beans, Friis Holm of Denmark; Idilio from Switzerland; Zotter from Austria; Marou from Vietnam and Qantu from Peru have joined the list of chocolates to graduate to the world stage.

The UK is now also able to boast its own bean-to-bar man, Willie Harcourt-Cooze, who was inspired by his own plantation in Venezuela. Duffy's Chocolate is also a relative new player on the scene and won the Academy of Chocolate Newcomer Award 2011 using Frank Homann's

Xoco cacao from Honduras. Chris Brennan and the Pump Street Bakery have won a place in the hearts of all of us chocolate lovers and Beau Cacao is a rising star.

For the past decade in the UK, the skills of a handful of talented individuals have been pushing the boundaries to make a difference to the way we look at chocolate. William Curley, Paul A Young, Marc Demarquette, Gerard Coleman of Artisan du Chocolate and Louise and Andrew Nason of MELT have joined Chantal Coady – long-time exponent of fine chocolate – as integral to the London chocolate scene. Outside of the capital, Shelly Preston of Ottar in

Nottinghamshire; Betty's in York; the Chocolate Tree in Edinburgh; Claire and Andy Burnet at Chococo in Dorset; Iain Burnett in the Scottish Highlands and Hideko Kawa of the SweetArt Lab have been the protagonists behind the growth of the quality chocolate scene in the UK.

Angus Thirlwell at Hotel Chocolat has revolutionised the high street, offering his customers a whole collection of chocolate products and has its own cacao plantation in St Lucia with a ravishing hotel complex. It also has a purpose-built chocolate factory in Huntingdon with pedigree. Anything from any of these producers will educate and delight in equal measure.



TOP OF THE *chocs*

BAR	%COCOA	ORIGIN	WEIGHT	PRICE	SUPPLIER	TASTING NOTE
Chocolat Madagascar – Dark Chocolate Couverture	100%	Madagascar	100g	£5.95	Chococo	Hints of orange and forest fruits. Smooth melting and texture
Akesson's – Forastero cocoa	75%	Brazil	60g	£4.95	Chocolate Trading Company	Earthy, woody notes balanced with honey, malt and maple syrup
Original Beans – Arhuaco Businchari	82%	Colombia	70g	£4.25	Original Beans	Heights of sweet spice; liquorice and sesame rise gently
Zotter – High-End	96%	Peru	32g	£3.60	Chocolate Trading Company	Earthy, rich cherry aroma, smooth, with a little bitterness
Marou – single origin dark chocolate	72%	Vietnam	80g	£6.50	Chococo	A finely balanced dark chocolate with a hint of spice
Duffy – Nicaragua Chuno	70%	Nicaragua	60g	£6.95	Duffy	Complex mix of fresh hay, red fruit and a roast chestnut aftertaste
Pump Street Bakery – Ambanja	72%	Madagascar	70g	£6.25	Pump Street Bakery	High notes of citrus mellowing into tropical fruits
Beau Cacao – Asajaya	73%	Malaysia	55g	£8.00	Beau Cacao	Caramel aromas turn to flavours of brioche, ganache and latte
Friis Holm – Johe	70%	Nicaragua	100g	£12.95	Cocoa Runners	Tobacco and leather, with a hint of wooded molasses



A MATTER OF TASTE

Ethics play a significant part in our entire food chain and chocolate is no exception. The 2016 Academy of Chocolate conference focused entirely on sustainability, innovation and education. The majority of chocolate producers pay heed to these issues and cannot afford not to.

However, a product that is Fairtrade or organic is all very well – but these gradings have no impact on quality or taste. While sales of all chocolate

have increased and the appreciation of proper chocolate has grown, there is still a long way to go.

With so many more questions being asked by the consumer as knowledge increases, it is more important than ever that chocolate must be about quality. Never underestimate the importance of sourcing every one of the ingredients and look globally for the range of flavours.

When buying chocolate,

discover where the cocoa originates and don't be obsessed with getting high percentages of cocoa mass or cocoa solids. It's not an indicator of quality or how good something will taste, or how responsibly it is produced.

Not all of us enjoy the same highs and lows – there is no accounting for taste – but quality is indubitable. Today 'real' chocolate commands a strong market with consumers seeming mostly at ease with

the price of true chocolate and the understanding the skills of the chocolate maker. Like anything, the best chocolate is often expensive, but the adage that less is more applies beautifully.

Chocolate that is well made with care in every element of production will taste as such. It's there to be celebrated and enjoyed and is as personal as someone's sense of style. Find what you like, and like what you know. □

Bon Appetit

Conserve specialist Bonne Maman has just launched a range of caramels and they are absolutely delicious

Whenever we see Bonne Maman's distinctive red gingham lid we know to expect something delicious. The French conserve specialist is renowned for using quality ingredients and championing traditional methods. Now you can enjoy it in an entirely new way thanks to the launch of a delicious caramel range. Both the hazelnut praline caramel and salted caramel are luxuriously smooth and versatile. Perfect for spreading on bread, pairing with croissants or drizzling over ice cream, they can be enjoyed at any time of day.

Salted caramel is delicately flavoured with Guérande sea salt from the north-west coast of France, which adds a delicious contrast to the sweetness of banoffee pie. Warm it gently with a dash of apple juice to create a light sauce, which becomes pleasingly chewy when it comes into contact with vanilla ice cream. The hazelnut is a darker, more intense caramel. We can't get enough of it at breakfast, spread on toast and topped with sliced banana. The range comes in dinky 220g

jars, which is a first for Bonne Maman. To find out more, like @BonneMamanUK on Facebook, or visit its website. It's packed with seasonal recipes, culinary tips and gourmet inspiration. bonnemaman.co.uk

FOOD AND TRAVEL PROMOTION

