CHOCOLATE

A 26-Point Primer

Bars and bonbons, dark and milk, single-origin and small-batch, Mexican and Vietnamese: The world of chocolate is vast and fascinating. With this A-to-Z guide, explore it in all its delicious variety.

By Damaris Soros

We love chocolate, and we think we know it well. But our understanding is undergoing an evolutionary leap, keeping pace with innovations in this treasured confection and world commodity. These changes have the potential to bring us more delicious chocolate and to improve the lives of the people who produce it.

Get a closer look around the equator, cocoa is a pod-shaped tropical fruit containing bitter seeds that, once processed, become cocoa and chocolate. The crop is the basis of a global industry currently growing at a rate of about 7.5% per year and expected to reach over $111 billion in revenue by 2020, according to Titan Market Research.

With a botanical name—Theobroma cacao—that translates as "food of the gods," the plant is grown by smallholder farmers based mostly in West Africa, Indonesia and throughout Latin America. The crop is loosely divided into two categories: bulk varieties grown for high yield, sold in the commodity market, that end up in conventional candy bars; and fine or "finest" cocoa destined for more specialized chocolates.

While the former sort of production dominates the market, a smaller industry dedicated to fine-grounding the unique flavors the crop has to offer—typically referred to as "fine"—mean-to-bar, "small batch," "artisanal" or "craft"—is on-the-rise. Craft chocolate makers tease out the immense range of flavors and tones found in different cocoa varieties around the world, whereas consistency has historically been the goal of mass-produced chocolate, here, diversity and complexity are the selling points.

Cocoa has more aroma compounds than tea, and flavors ranging from fruity and floral to nutty and herbaceous. A chocolate will have a different character depending on whether it’s produced in, say, Cameroon or Benin, and also thanks to specific practices employed along its journey to market.

Without farmers, there is no chocolate—no mocha java, no cappuccino—yet the economics for them can be harsh. A 2017 study from the French Development Agency and chocolate manufacturer Barry Callebaut found that farmers in Ivory Coast (the world’s largest producer of cocoa) earn roughly $1 per day, below the World Bank’s threshold for absolute poverty. By supporting the craft industry’s efforts to source directly from farmers and pay a premium for higher-quality, diverse and delicious cocoa, we can help grow a robust market for farmers, makers and chocolate lovers.

This guide is a celebration of chocolate—of where it comes from, who grows it and the sensory experiences held within its wrappers. You’ll find tools for understanding aromatic profiles for baking and chocolate making, implications of the ways in which origin and certifications impact the end price and product; and lists of cocoa in ready-to-eat forms, from nibs and chips to covertures, bars, truffles and bonbons. By sampling chocolate in its many manifestations, learning its long history and supporting the people and regions that produce it, we can ensure a steady and infinitely varied supply of excellent chocolate for many reasons to come.

For a detailed detour into chocolate around the world, turn to p. 04
Chocolate From Aroma to Za’atar

We experience chocolate with the brain as well as the palate. For those looking to deepen their appreciation of the beloved bean, this cacao-focused round-up offers edification on top of enjoyment.

The WALL STREET JOURNAL

ITALIAN DRINKING

A for Caffè+ Cuore Azurri

B for Caffè

C for Churro

D for Dark Milk

E for Educated Palate

F for Fair

G for Ghana

H for handset

I for Infinite

J for Jenny

K for Kitchen

L for Latin America

M for McIlhenny

N for Non-Cow

O for Origin

P for Percentage

Q for Rustic

R for Variable

S for Subscription

T for Tea

U for Unravel

V for Zaatar

W for White Chocolate

X for Xocolatl

Y for Year

Z for Butter

Percentage + Faire + Origin

APPELLATION AWARINESS

The aroma of chocolates currently available can be dizzying. Where existing what is really fit, look for details on appellation and origin, certifications such as Rainforest Alliance and Fair Trade, and direct-trade designations. These indicate the information makers pay to people who produce the cocoa and regions where it’s grown.

IT BEGINS

The post- shaped fruit that yields cocoa and chocolate.

IT CONTINUES

We find the best cacao-based drinks, from artisanal takes to chocolate bars, from the Americas and beyond.

For those seeking to deepen their appreciation of the beloved bean, a cacao-focused round-up offers edification on top of enjoyment.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL