

# THE RISE OF chocolate snobbery

Our love of the brown stuff isn't diminishing – indeed our tastes are only getting *more* discerning. So how much of a chocolate connoisseur are you?

PHOTOGRAPHY: DAVID NEWTON WORDS: KERRY POTTER

**C**hocolate is one of life's simple, universal pleasures: nearly all of us like it and eating it (in moderation) makes us feel happy. It's a no-brainer, right? Except... it's all become rather complicated of late. Last week, I got the train home one evening with a friend. As it was her birthday, we merrily shared a box of Charbonnel et Walker Pink Champagne Truffles (you know the ones I mean), cooing over the retro packaging and offering the decadent treats to our fellow travellers. Fun times. Fast forward to last night; I also ate some chocolate on my train home. This time, however, it was a very different experience: shattered and starving, I located a squished, ancient Mars bar lurking at the bottom of my handbag. I discreetly removed the wrapper, before ramming it into my mouth at lightning speed. Why? I didn't want my fellow commuters to clock my choice of chocolate.

Turns out I'm not the only one who's gone a bit elitist when it comes to cocoa-based snacks. 'Posh' chocolate has become a badge of honour, yet another status symbol. My doctor friend Michelle raves about the 100% Madagascan cocoa Pralus chocolate in her fridge and its high antioxidant, sugar-free health benefits. But with a bit of prodding, she confesses she keeps a bag of Cadbury Dairy Milk Buttons in her freezer (hidden there both to stop her eating too many and so visitors don't spy them). Another friend Nina talks of the "chocolate politics" in her accountancy firm. The woman who sits next to Nina started at the firm this week, arriving on day one clutching an enormous box of Pierre Marcolini Belgian chocolates to share with her new team. Nina duly googled them to discover they cost £60: "It was a pretty impressive move, I thought. They were a huge talking point and everyone warmed to her immediately," she notes. "I don't think



I'M ALLOWED ONE HANDFUL OF CHOCOLATE A DAY RIGHT?

a corner shop box of Maltesers would have had the same impact somehow." Nina, by the way, eats mini Green & Black's bars with her 4pm office cup of tea, but enjoys a Twix in the privacy of her own home, usually accompanied with a fierce hangover.

**RAISING THE BAR**

Sales of chocolate in the UK continue to rise – it's an affordable luxury in hard times – but dark and artisan chocolates are performing especially well, despite chocolate prices rising due to a couple of difficult harvests. Waitrose reports that in the last year sales of milk chocolate have risen 37%, white chocolate 15% and dark

chocolate a whopping 48%. Green & Black's biggest selling bar is their 70% dark, one of which is sold every 10 seconds, while Lindt's 99% cocoa bar can be found at your local convenience store. And the last few years have seen an explosion of artisan chocolatiers, both online and on our high streets. You can go to chocolate tastings, join chocolate clubs – for example, Hotel Chocolat will send you a monthly box of goodies in the post for your delectation, in the style of a wine club. If you eat at the hip Newman Street Tavern in London, you can share a large bar of Original Beans dark chocolate with your friends over

coffee (After Eight mints, your time is up), while that same brand of artisan chocolate also sells rather grandiose "libraries" of chocolate – what you or I might call a selection pack. The lady may love Milk Tray, but clearly not as much as she once did.

**TREAT YOU RIGHT**

So why this move to the dark side? There are health reasons: the higher the cocoa percentage of chocolate, the less sugar they need to add. It also makes it richer so you eat less in one sitting – the "just two squares a day" concept that makes us think of it less as evil junk food and more of an acceptable treat. And the darker the chocolate, the more antioxidants it contains, which can help delay damage to cells and tissue and fight free radicals associated with cardiovascular disease. Then there's a question of ethics – with chocolate, as with clothes, you get what you pay for and we've started to ask questions

**"ORIGINAL BEANS SELL GRANDIOSE 'LIBRARIES' OF CHOCOLATE... A SELECTION PACK WITH AN UPGRADE"**

about where our chocolate comes from. Issues such as forced child labour in some West African cocoa farms, and farmers fighting to be paid fairly for their crop by the big corporations – has led to the rise of Fairtrade brands such as Divine. But there are less noble reasons for our finely-honed passion too. We like to be seen to be knowledgeable about, and engaged with, our food: the devil is in the detail with provenance and quality and everyone is a foodie now – knowing your Madagascan cocoa beans from your Venezuelan ones is of paramount importance. "There's been the rise of the chocolate connoisseur who treats chocolate in the same way they

**WHAT DOES YOUR CHOCOLATE CHOICE SAY ABOUT YOU?**

*Forget the Rorschach inkblot test, your favourite chocolate bar is the ultimate measure of your personality. No, really*

<p><b>GREEN &amp; BLACK'S</b> You're stylish but not too 'fashion'. You think Kate Middleton is brilliant. You flirt with the sea salt and 70% but you always go back to the milk.</p>	<p><b>MALTESERS</b> You run, you juice, you practice yoga, you did ballet as a child and loved the advert with the ballerinas. They're more air than chocolate, so they're the healthy option (right?)</p>	<p><b>DIVINE</b> You tell everyone that it's the only Fairtrade chocolate that's 45% owned by farmers. You subscribe to <i>The Guardian</i>. You wish you were married to Chris Martin.</p>	<p><b>TOBLERONE</b> You heart the Eighties. You went skiing as a child. And you're thrilled at the news that this Christmas, Heroes tins will contain your triangular favourite. Result.</p>	<p><b>PAULA YOUNG 85% RAW ECUADORIAN PLAIN TRUFFLE</b> Your favourite things are pop-ups, Hackney and oversized glasses. A gifted Terry's Chocolate Orange is an insult.</p>	<p><b>YORKIE</b> You pride yourself on fighting against gender stereotypes. Although you do worry whether that terrible sexist ad campaign means you should boycott it instead.</p>
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do wine: they have it at the table, let it melt on their palate and then analyse and discuss it," says artisan chocolatier Aneesh Popat (the-chocolatier.co.uk), who supplies Michelin-starred restaurants. "It's always nice to have a talking point at a dinner and knowing about chocolate is now seen as sophisticated." We want to be the woman who can guess cocoa percentages with pinpoint accuracy and airily deconstruct the flavours of an artisan truffle (do we detect topnotes of liquorice perhaps?) – rather than the one who mindlessly wolfs down three Creme Eggs in front of the TV.

Our blossoming love for fancy-pants chocolate means the milk and white varieties are now viewed as the Lambrusco of the chocolate world: great when you're starting out, but not so good when you're a grown up. Or are they? Cadbury's Dairy Milk and Mars Galaxy remain two of the UK's biggest selling bars, with both containing just 25% and 26% cocoa respectively. And almost every chocolate expert I spoke to for this piece admitted to a penchant for a Christmas tin of Roses or Heroes: the kind of chocolate that makes us feel nostalgic, safe and warm inside (and just a little bit nauseous when you don't know when to stop).

My own weak spot is Easter egg chocolate – the sweeter, the better, preferably a big Smarties one with a bonus mug. As Judith Lewis, author of chocolate blog mostlyaboutchocolate.com, puts it: "Milk chocolate still outsells dark chocolate because it's more palatable. But we want to be seen to eat dark chocolate as it's perceived as more adult and sexy."

### MAGIC BEANS

Chocolate was first discovered in the Americas 2,500 years ago by ancient Mayans, who roasted and ground the bean into a paste and turned it into a drink. It didn't arrive in Europe until the 16th century, after Spain colonised Mexico. Europeans added milk and sugar, and it was a big hit with royalty and the upper classes, with the first drinking chocolate house opening in London in 1657. Then in the 19th century, Cadbury and JS Fry & Sons got savvy with emulsification techniques and the mass-produced modern chocolate bar was born.

During the Second World War chocolate was sent to soldiers

## BOX CLEVER

*Stylist puts together their chocolate selection box of dreams*

	
<b>FERRERO ROCHER</b>	<b>MILK TRAY ORANGE CRESCENT</b>
	
<b>GUYLIAN CHOCOLATE SEA SHELL</b>	<b>CELEBRATIONS' MALTESERS TEASERS</b>
	
<b>CADBURY HEROES' CREME EGG TWISTED</b>	<b>HOTEL CHOCOLAT 70% DARK WITH CHILLI PUDDLES</b>
	
<b>THORNTONS' VIENNESE TRUFFLE</b>	<b>CADBURY ROSES' GOLDEN BARREL</b>
	
<b>QUALITY STREET HAZELNUT IN CARAMEL</b>	<b>PAUL A YOUNG BANOFFEE PIE</b>

## “THOSE RISQUÉ FLAKE ADVERTS – A PRECIOUS HALF HOUR TO YOURSELF – WERE FIRST DREAMED UP IN 1959”

to give them energy to fight, but by the Sixties it had become an indulgence associated with women. We have the Mad Men of the day to thank for that: those risqué, phallic Flake adverts – all luxury and a precious half hour to yourself – were first dreamed up in 1959.

In recent years, with the obesity epidemic in full swing, chocolate has been given short shrift,

thanks to its high sugar and fat content of many varieties. Hence, the current craze for healthier dark chocolate, with which we can (mixed metaphor alert) have our cake and eat it.

And so to the future... while salted caramel chocolate is currently big news, our spirit for adventure means an increase in more unusual combinations. Aneesh

Popat's black olive and pink peppercorn is selling well – it's his take on salt and pepper, with strawberry and black olive also popular. Waitrose's confectionary developer Rebecca Neale is experimenting with muscovado brown sugar flavours: "Like Horlicks, it's warm and malty and quite retro-tasting". Judith Lewis, meanwhile, points to the emerging trend for "dark milk" – something of an oxymoron but what is essentially a middle-ground chocolate, around 50-55% cocoa, which appeals to today's sophisticated consumer, yet is also sweeter than normal dark chocolate. Currently, you have to seek it out – try the Waitrose Seriously range's top-seller Intense Milk Chocolate 49% Cocoa, Hotel Chocolat or Paul A Young. This might just be the Holy Grail for those of us who bore on about 70 percenters but secretly adore Milky Ways.

### THE ULTIMATE TASTE SENSATION

When it comes to choosing our chocolate, the experts say that it's actually *not* a numbers game: "It's not about the percentage of the cocoa, it's the about the quality and provenance of the bean. Just because it's 80% doesn't mean it's amazing," says Neale. Instead, we should look at the ingredients list – the fewer, the better – and note if the beans' country of origin is detailed (if yes, that's good). When you eventually get it out of the wrapper and into your mouth, a small amount should go a long way: "You want it to linger in your mouth for as long as possible – really good chocolate should leave that taste in your mouth for 30-45 minutes after you've eaten it, which stops you craving more," says Neale.

But ultimately, say the experts, we should simply eat the chocolate we like best and not worry about what anyone else thinks. "I may judge chocolate industry awards but it doesn't mean I don't buy a Dairy Milk, tear a strip off and dip it in my coffee," says Lewis. "The most important thing is that you experiment and you don't get put off by what other people say you should or shouldn't like. Find something *you* enjoy and indulge in moderation."

With that in mind, I'd like to disclose that while researching and writing this piece, I consumed the following: four Monty Bojangles Salted Caramels, six squares of Lindt Excellence Sea Salt dark chocolate, and, um, a Kinder Surprise Egg. Don't judge me.

