



The 4<sup>th</sup> annual West Coast Chocolate Festival, October 15-22, 2005  
[www.chocolatefestival.ca](http://www.chocolatefestival.ca)      [www.festivalduchocolat.ca](http://www.festivalduchocolat.ca)

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For Immediate Release

## **The Experience of Chocolate**

*The West Coast Chocolate Festival provides lots of ways to experience chocolate*

Smooth, silky, sweet, sumptuous...there are many ways to describe the experience of chocolate. Now, the skyrocketing popularity of chocolate due has people searching for new words to describe it.

You'd have to bring a dictionary to describe all the varieties of chocolate at the fourth annual West Coast Chocolate Festival, October 15-22 in the Tri-Cities. The festival's 12 events, from chocolate factory tours to a consumer trade show to tastings and a gala dinner, add up to many new ways to experience chocolate.

### **The Good Health of Chocolate**

Devotees have always known about chocolate's mood-calming effects, when eaten in moderation, due to the presence of phenylethylamine, a natural mood enhancer. Medical research shows that state of mind can directly affect personal health. Recently, chocolate has been touted for lowering cholesterol because it contains polyphenols.

The key for both of these health benefits is the amount of cocoa present in chocolate. More cocoa means more beneficial plant chemicals, which are responsible for its health effects.

Dark chocolate has the most cocoa, and varieties with as much as 99% cocoa have enjoyed sales increases compared to the ever-popular milk chocolate. Milk chocolate ranges from about 30 to 40% cocoa, and white chocolate has no cocoa at all.

One of the new ways to experience chocolate is with yoga.

"Chocolate Yoga is all about appreciation," says **Pamela Reno**, the first Vancouver-area practitioner of the chocolate yoga craze that's sweeping New York. Reno is undertaking BC's first demonstration of chocolate yoga, a craze that's sweeping New York, at Chocolate Spa Night, October 21.

"Yoga is about being mindful, paying attention to each moment. It's also about self-discipline" says Reno. "When you participate in yoga and chocolate at the same time, the effect is to heighten the benefits of each one, and the self discipline of being in the moment means you get more benefits from yoga and from chocolate."

According to Reno, who owns Haute Chocolate in West Vancouver and has been doing yoga for twenty years, chocolate yoga is also helpful to those who gorge on their chocolate.

“When you bring the discipline of yoga to eating chocolate, you savour every second. When people say they’re chocoholics, I say chocolate yoga can help them appreciate it more.”

### **The Taste of Chocolate**

The experience of chocolate is important to **wine educator John Gerum**, whose company West Coast Wine Education conducts pairings with wine and chocolate.

“Let your own taste guide you through the experience with some basic guidelines,” advises Gerum. “Find fine chocolates that appeal to you. Are they sweet or bitter? Are they dark or light? Do they display different fruit or nut flavours?”

“Once you determine the chocolates, look to a wine that has similar flavour profiles and sweetness levels. A visit to your local wine store to explore various wines will start you off on the right track.”

Gerum recommends tasting the chocolate first. “For an enjoyable tasting, ensure that you taste the chocolate first and wine second and then combine the two at once to discover a successful match.

“Red fruit based dark bitter chocolates work well with fruit concentrated red wines. Try an Australian Cabernet Sauvignon or a California Zinfandel with a dark chocolate blackberry truffle for a unique experience!

“Late harvest wines, ice wines and sweet muscats marry well with orchard or tropical fruit based chocolate ganaches. This is the ideal combination for the sweeter palate.”

### **The Art of Chocolate**

Another part of the experience of chocolate is its visual appeal. It can be melted and cooled, and crafted into shapes. This provides a variety of uses in cooking, and chocolate is one of the hottest culinary trends.

This popularity has been noticed by the **BC Chef’s Association** which is holding its first chocolate competition at All Things Chocolate, a consumer tradeshow festival event on October 16.

“We have three categories for the competition - bon bon, show piece and plated dessert – and each category has different judging criteria from appearance, texture, level of difficulty and flavour.” says Tamas Runyai, executive director of the association. The public will have a chance to see these works of art.

“The competition will be a "blind" judging to ensure fairness in judging... suffice it to say that some of the best chocolatiers and pastry chefs in the region have entered. Competitors will set up their displays and leave the room before judges arrive. We are still receiving entries and expect to be just over 20 competitors - very encouraging for a first time.”

The association is the BC chapter of the Canadian Culinary Foundation, dedicated to the education and skills development of professional chefs.

Is it hard to create a work of art with chocolate? According to **Paolo Pero** of Italian Bakery, the two biggest challenges are temperature and cleanliness. “Working with chocolate is time-sensitive. Plus, the smallest impurity can ruin chocolate. It must be prepared in a very clean environment.”

Pero says the taste is just as important as the presentation. “You can have the prettiest pastry, but it has to taste good or it won’t be satisfying. You want to wow them and satisfy them.”

“It’s all about the taste. If I don’t like it, I won’t serve it” is the simple motto of **Philippe LeRoux**, a French-trained pastry chef and chocolatier with 17 years experience. Le Roux helps create about 100 items for Italia Bakery, and about 70 per cent of those are made with chocolate.

“Chocolate is the world's most popular flavour,” says Runyai. “The North American palate continues to develop sophistication and high quality chocolate like Cluizel - new to Canada - are becoming ever more popular. You only have to go to most upscale food stores to see the many varieties of chocolate that have hit the marketplace recently.”

The West Coast Chocolate Festival features 12 events over 8 days, in “a celebration of chocolate and all it inspires”. Find more information at [www.chocolatefestival.ca](http://www.chocolatefestival.ca) or phone 604-939-8068.

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