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SWEETS

A chocolate lover's paradise

Love it, savour it, celebrate it – it's easy to do at the West Coast Chocolate Festival

BY KAREN GRAM
VANCOUVER SUN

To hear Marcus Von Albrecht tell it, the pairing of rich dark chocolate with a single-malt scotch is almost a religious experience. A slow meditation focusing on the nose, the taste and, finally, the finish.

Ah, the finish. "You'll see how the dark chocolate is picked up by the scotch," he says.

At least you will if you attend the sixth annual West Coast Chocolate Festival, which starts with two trade shows this afternoon and evening at Red Robinson Theatre in Coquitlam, and runs until Nov. 10.

All of the festival participating sponsors will be there, sampling their notions of how chocolate can enrich life.

Von Albrecht will be there.

He's the chef of Mava Foods and a scotch expert, and he knows a thing or two about taste.

For example, milk chocolate is a disaster with single malts, he says, but might work better with the blended whiskeys.

His main event happens Friday evening at the Pacific Institute of Culinary Arts, where he will pair some of the finest scotches (Ileach Peaty, Finlaggan Old Reserve, Ileach cask strength and Laphroaig 10-year-old) with excellent dark chocolate from Xoxolat Chocolaterie and desserts made by PICA chefs.

Listen to what Xoxolat's Hodie Rondeau will pair with the Laphroaig 10-year-old:

"Cluizel 99%. Created from the highly respected Criollo cocoa from Madagascar. Pralus have produced a flamboyant character dark chocolate with many fruit and acidulous top notes from raspberry to red wine, continuing through the more caramelized richer flavours to a treacle-like finish. A very fine chocolate as one should expect from such a high grade of cocoa used and its reputable origin."

You don't want to miss that.

The festival is a chocolate lover's paradise.

Throughout the month, the festival will present a box of chocolate treats to the palate... and the soul.

There will be beer and chocolate



The West Coast Chocolate Festival will present a number of events over the next month, including sessions on pairing chocolate with scotch, beer, tea and even yoga.

pairings. (Belgian chocolate with low-hops wheat beers, fruit beers and porters. There will be tea and chocolate pairings with tea connoisseur Nancy Prokosh, owner of Tealicious. Prokosh has found



the perfect teas for milk, semi-sweet, dark and white chocolates.

There's also chocolate High Tea at Schokolade Cafe on East Hastings, wine and Rueben's chocolates pairings hosted by West

Coast Wine Education's John Gellum and tours of Charlie's Chocolate Factory.

You can even have a yoga or meditation class paired with chocolate.

At a glance

WEST COAST CHOCOLATE FESTIVAL

Today through Nov. 10

Sixteen events about chocolate ranging from the opening trade show at Red Robinson Theatre including tastings and samplings, to a single malt scotch and chocolate tasting, to a multi-course meal at Horizons Restaurant.

Tickets are \$20-\$125, details at www.chocolatefestival.ca

Part of the festival is about teaching mindfulness through chocolate, explains organizer Kirsten Swallow.

"You have to let it melt in your mouth, taste the note elements. Good chocolate has a lot of different flavours. You have to slow down to taste it."

The festival used to be centred exclusively in the TriCity area, but this year it is pushing out into Burnaby and Vancouver with participants such as the Pacific Institute of Culinary Arts offering lessons in cooking with chocolate that will incorporate the history of the glorious bean, how it is made and how it should be eaten.

At Schokolade Cafe, chocolatier Edward Suter will offer a chocolate appreciation seminar where you can learn all about the making of chocolates and how to select good quality chocolate for home use while dipping hand-crafted chocolates to take home.

The events are spread out over a month so that each one can be savoured like a good chocolate.

The festival will wrap up with a fancy dinner gala at Horizons on Burnaby Mountain Nov. 10.

Chef John Garrett and Wim Tas of ChocolaTas will prepare a multi-course meal incorporating seasonal West Coast cuisine, chocolate and great wines with each course.

For details and for tickets go to www.chocolatefestival.ca.

kgram@vancouver.sun.com