

Heaven-scent

Most pastry chefs agree...
there's no better way to go
than death by chocolate

by Dani Friedland



**Gianduja crèmeux cake, \$15,
Pastry Chef Sarah Kosikowski,
Sixteen, Chicago. RECIPE, p. 105.**

It's been a few decades since Marcel Desaulniers began proverbially killing people with his infamous "death by chocolate" seven-layer chocolate torte at The Trellis Restaurant in Williamsburg, Va., but America's sweet tooth, it seems, can't get enough of desserts stacked with chocolate. The more chocolate in a dish, the more elements there are to balance on the palate. But the extra work offers sweet rewards.

"All chocolates have different cocoa liquor ratios in them, and they have different acids, different flavor profiles, different viscosity," says Executive Pastry Chef Nicole Coady at Boston's Finale Desserterie & Bakery. "It becomes challenging when you try blending different chocolates."

CREATING A BALANCE

For Coady's symphony cake (\$3, recipe, plateonline.com) the trick is in the layers of milk, white and dark chocolate. The bitterest mousse is on the bottom, which gives the palate a chance to adjust before getting to it. "If you start with the bitter, it's hard for sweet to fight it down," Coady says. As a bonus, the milk, white and dark presentation is visually arresting. Layers of chocolate buttermilk cake between the layers seal the deal while adding cake texture to what she describes as "the smoothest, creamiest pudding" consistency.

It's essential that the symphony be balanced, as it is accompanied on the chocolate crescendo plate by Thai-inspired flavors, like a ginger *anglaise* and a pad Thai truffle with



**Gianduja chocolate torte, \$8,
Chef Jake Martin, Fenouil in the
Pearl, Portland, Ore.
RECIPE, p. 106.**



lime and peanut cream in white chocolate with a touch of cayenne pepper. “The biggest challenge that I had with using the different chocolates was trying to keep the flavors separate but still allowing them to blend,” she notes.

For Executive Chef Jake Martin of Portland, Ore.’s Fenouil, the mix of dark and milk chocolate works. “If it was just the dark chocolate, it would be too rich after four courses,” he says, adding that milk chocolate might not be rich enough.

The solution? The guanaja chocolate torte (\$8, recipe, p. 106): a flourless dark chocolate torte with a chocolate glaze on a salted cookie crust, served with a milk chocolate *crème anglaise*, salted chocolate meringue and cherry sorbet.

TALKING TEXTURE

At Co Co. Sala in Washington, D.C., Executive Chef-Pastry Chef Santosh Tiptur’s chocolate

onyx (\$10, recipe, plateonline.com) was created to be not only a blend of chocolates but also of textures. The base of the dessert is a moist, chewy brownie made with a 55 percent dark chocolate; on the sweet side, and not too bitter. Atop the brownie, there’s a creamy chocolate mousse with intense, dark chocolate flavor from a 72 percent dark chocolate. To balance the flavor, Tiptur adds a vanilla *crème brûlée*: “It’s a nice contrast to the chocolate,” he says.

After the onyx is sprayed with a 64 percent dark chocolate, it gets a dose of salted caramel to cut the sweetness from the dark chocolate and the sugar in the mousse, leaving what Tiptur calls “the rich feel of dark chocolate on the palate.”

Crunchy chocolate balls, a chocolate logo and a dark chocolate sorbet round out the dish.

Tiptur says the point was to

have guests experience several different cocoa percentages in one dessert. “If I would have used one type of chocolate for the whole thing, it probably would have turned out to be really sweet,” he says, but with a depth of flavors and textures, “each bite is really a nice experience.”

Chocolate itself can bring several different textures to the table, from creamy elements to crunchy nibs, which play a starring role in the nibby guanaja chocolate torte (\$7.50, recipe, plateonline.com) at Café Flora in Seattle. The crunchy cocoa nibs offset the smooth chocolate frosting, sweetened with maple for more depth of flavor, in this four-layer vegan cake. The cake also has hazelnut

cacao filling, chocolate ganache, hazelnut praline and a raspberry coulis.

Indulgence can go by the wayside in veganism, Owner Nat Stratton-Clarke says, but



working with vegan chocolate is like working with any other chocolate. Just be sure you're using the best quality chocolate, and one without milk powder, he says. "I think there are very few vegan cakes out there," he says, and he strives to keep one on the menu.

At Sixteen in Chicago's Trump International Hotel & Tower, Pastry Chef Sarah Kosikowski can't take her texturally diverse gianduja *crèmeux* (\$15, recipe, p. 105) off the menu. "Literally every single component is chocolate," she says.

The dessert begins with a milk chocolate sponge, topped with a crispy layer of feuilletine and praline paste with milk chocolate, a dense gianduja mousse for a hint of hazelnut flavor, and a chocolate glaze. Then the dish gets a touch of roasted white chocolate powder, a cocoa caramel, a tube of caramelized milk chocolate, a *crèmeux*,

cocoa streusel and cocoa nib ice cream.

When it comes to blending different kinds of chocolate, Kosikowski starts with a simple task: tasting. "A lot of times I don't even taste the whole dessert until it's ready to go out," she says, relying instead on a dictionary of flavors in her head. But that guide can only suggest a range of cocoa content to begin—something in the '60s or '70s, say, to go with beets—but then it's a matter of tasting them. "I taste-test all day" she says.

BEHIND THE BEAN

For Lincoln Carson, corporate pastry chef at Michael Mina Group, it's not about percentage. "It's the origin of the chocolate, the way it was processed," he says.

The manjari chocolate he uses in his chocolate *delice* (recipe, plateonline.com) is made from a blend of beans from Madagascar, which gives the chocolate a highly acidic nature while being very fruity and almost floral—matching the hibiscus in the dish.

"The pairing of that chocolate with the hibiscus makes sense," he says, and the same goes for the jasmine in the devil's food cake. Jasmine has less of a perceived flavor but a strong scent, and it pairs well with any chocolate, he says.

Those two floral elements have a lot of chocolate to play with in the finished dish. A cylinder of manjari mousse with a salted caramel center gets coated with dark chocolate dust before it joins the jasmine-scented manjari devil's food cake, hibiscus fluid gel and a hibiscus glass set with agar and maltodextrin. It's perfectly clear, with a great color and snap, Carson says. "That technique works with strong flavors."

But although everyone knows the cocoa bean and some know the nib, Gabriel



Mitchell of The Summit SF in San Francisco uses a less well-known component of chocolate in his black velveteen (\$10, recipe, plateonline.com): cocoa fruit. The puréed pulp of the cocoa pod, Mitchell says, has no chocolate flavor; instead, it's very floral, almost lychee-like. "It's rich, it's

velvety, it's kind of earthy, it's decadent," Mitchell says. "I use it only in chocolate desserts because I haven't figured out how to use it outside of a chocolate dessert."

But even then, diners can't guess what it is, he says, because it's so different from processed chocolate. "If you're a chocolate lover, then you need to know this part of chocolate," he says.

Mitchell uses the fruit as a parfait in place of ice cream or sorbet. And that's exactly how it appears in his black velveteen—as a *quenelle* of parfait. There's a chocolate cake element made with dehydrated beet powder in place of the flour, with sugar-brined beets, a chocolate-beet *moelleux*, a raspberry-beet fluid gel and a cocoa nib nougatine.

"If you look at it, it's a deconstructed red velvet cake," Mitchell says. "I pull out the beet. To replace the cream cheese frosting element is the cocoa fruit parfait...cocoa fruit is real white chocolate."

Dani Friedland stubbornly refuses to believe there is such a thing as too much chocolate. * For recipes from this article and more, visit plateonline.com.

MELT AWAY

* Once chocolates melt, they may have different consistencies. Generally speaking, unsweetened chocolate will be fairly runny. Semi-sweet, sweet or white chocolate will hold more of its shape until it's stirred.

* You can melt chocolate with liquids (at least 1/4 cup liquid per 6 ounces of chocolate), but adding even one drop of liquid to melted chocolate will make it seize. To correct 6 ounces of seized chocolate, stir in 1 tablespoon of fat, like vegetable oil, butter, or cocoa butter, and remelt as needed.

* Are you adding melted chocolate to cookie dough or cake batter? Wait until it's cooled to room temperature, or it could change the texture of the finished product.