

# TEA & COFFEE

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## *An Obsession with Quality and a Passion for Sustainability*

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## A Decadent Pairing: Tea and Chocolate

Combining foods and foods and beverages that may not seem as though they would “go together” but do in fact complement each other, is nothing new. Wine and cheese, sea salt and caramel, both are perfect examples. Now a new couple has emerged—tea and chocolate. Pairing terroir teas with single-origin chocolates creates a refined gourmet experience. **By Barbara Dufrêne**

The new trend launched by some eclectic chocolate manufacturers in France and Belgium in the past few years combines the approach “from bean to bar” with the exclusive use of single-origin and estate chocolates. The third Gourmet Chocolate Festival was held within the big Trade Fair European/Intersuc in Paris, France in March 2014. The invited country was Madagascar, a small producer of rare and premium cocoa varieties, which are all grown in the North Western part of the country, the Sambirano Valley and close to little island of Nosy Be.

Several chocolate manufacturers operate in Madagascar, from the oldest

family-founded local manufacturer, Chocolats Robert, to the newer local company, Menacao. Swedish Akesson’s and French François Pralus are two other companies that currently operate chocolate factories in Madagascar. A number of other chocolate makers bring the cocoa beans to Europe or North America and then process them in their own manufacturing facilities.

The cocoa tree was introduced to Madagascar from Central America by French settlers in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. It has prospered in the Sambirano Valley region for almost two centuries and produced a series of local hybrids, all belonging to the Criollo cocoa family,

which is renowned for its delicate acidity. With a low yield—less than 5 percent of global production—and slow growth, the Criollo cocoas are treasured by chocolate lovers all over the world.

Thirty different chocolates made with cocoa beans from Madagascar, either locally or in Europe, were been registered for the championship. The winners were a Belgian chocolate, made by Pierre Marcolini; a French chocolate, made by Jacques Genin; and a locally manufactured Madagascar chocolate, made by the Swedish Akesson’s.

The Chocolate and Tea Pairing session took place in the George Cannon Tea House in downtown Paris, where each of the three chocolates was first assessed for the complexity and strength of its flavor, before suggesting potentially suitable teas. The selected teas were then tasted with the chocolates to ensure that there was mutual flavor enhancement: intensifying both the cup’s and the chocolate’s specific taste and texture qualities.

This experience underlined the complexity of both product groups. The exercise was finalized by following the suggestions made by Olivier Scala, an international tea taster and tea expert, who selected the following terroir tea cups to pair with specific chocolates:

- Marcolini chocolate (72 percent cocoa content) with a Darjeeling black tea, a first flush from Malhalderram tea garden, the Jungpana Tea Estate;
- Genin chocolate (80 percent cocoa content) with a famous Chinese black tea, a Keemun from Anhui, Huangshan;
- Akesson’s chocolate (75 percent Criollo cocoa content) with a North Fujian Wulong tea, a Wuyi Shan Rou Gui.

The pairing opportunities with tea and chocolate seem to be limitless. Further taste experimentations are planned for the next few months. ☕

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