THE Bluffer's® GUIDE TO

CHOCOLATE

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NEW TITLE

THE Bluffer's® GUIDE TO

CHOCOLATE

Neil Davey

Bluffer's®

Hammersley House
5-8 Warwick Street
London W1B 5LX
United Kingdom

Email: info@bluffers.com
Website: bluffers.com
Twitter: @BluffersGuide

Published 2014

Publisher: Thomas Drewry
Publishing Director: Brooke McDonald

Series Editor: David Allsop
Design and Illustration: Jim Shannon

A CIP Catalogue record for this book
is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978-1-909937-04-8 (print)
978-1-909937-05-5 (ePub)
978-1-909937-06-2 (Kindle)

CONTENTS

If there's one food item that can really lay claim to being the food of love, it's chocolate.

THE FOOD OF LOVE

Shakespeare once suggested that music was the food of love. These days, chocolate has a powerful claim to being the food of love – not to mention the new black, the new Friday, the new 50, the new 80 and the new rock 'n' roll as well.

It all started with the sexing up of food itself. A few years ago, you were a genius if you could mix up a prawn cocktail sauce and translate half a dozen items on a French menu. These days, even if you own only a kettle and a toaster, many people still expect you to be able to rustle up something to make Gordon Ramsay weep, be fluent in 14 different menu languages and be able to spot a ripe avocado at 20 paces.

A rudimentary knowledge of food is no longer socially acceptable. People do not simply ask you where you went on holiday; they want to know what and where you ate when you went on holiday, mostly so that they can ask if you visited that charming little deli in the old town that weaves its own tiramisu and crochets its own olive oil. People don't want to know what you've done to the beef; they want to

know the cow's name, its family tree, which field it was kept in and whether it was Jethro or his brother who killed it. In the same way, they now want to know which bean has been used in the composition of your chocolate, and on which estate in which country it was grown.

There could be many reasons why this sort of knowledge is now so desirable. Perhaps it sets you apart as a world traveller with an unquenchable curiosity and a wealth of fascinating experience behind you. Maybe it's just because it suggests that you have a great deal of disposable income. Whatever the reason, there's one undeniable fact: it makes chocolate a wonderful subject for the art of bluffing.*

So to return to the Shakespeare paraphrasing, if there's one particular food item that can really lay claim to being 'the food of love', it's definitely chocolate. It's cool, it's sexy, and it's available in myriad forms everywhere, from service stations to dedicated temples to the chocolatier's shop. It can be accessible or luxurious, cheap or expensive. It's produced all over the world and has a wealth of history behind it. It is said to possess all sorts of qualities, from aphrodisiac to energy booster. The process to turn it from bean to bar is fantastically complex. It is, therefore, the perfect food for the bluffer.

Over the next 100 pages or so you'll find everything you need to know to impress friends, family, colleagues, the opposite sex, passing chefs and patronising waiters. Whether you're a regular consumer of French luxury

*See *The Bluffer's Guide to Food.*

chocolate Valrhona or if your knowledge begins and ends with a Mars Bar, you'll be able to hold your own in any chocolate-related situation. Even better, should you wish (for whatever reason) to do the additional research required without eating lots of different chocolate, this book will allow you to pontificate expertly without a crumb of the stuff passing your lips.

It sets out to conduct you through the main danger zones encountered in discussions about chocolate, and to equip you with a vocabulary and evasive technique that will minimise the risk of being rumbled as a bluffer. It will give you a few easy-to-learn hints and methods designed to ensure that you will be accepted as a chocolate aficionado of rare ability and experience.

But it will do more. It will provide you with the tools to impress legions of marvelling listeners with your knowledge and insight – without anyone discovering that, before reading it, you didn't know the difference between a bar of Fruit and Nut and an artisan micro-batch production of chocolate made from pure Criollo beans sourced from the Chuao plantation in Venezuela's Aragua valley. (Try to remember the latter part of that sentence, and quote it frequently – it's bluffing gold.)

Ten cacao beans would secure the
services of someone in – ahem –
the world's oldest profession;
it appears, then, that some people have
always done anything for chocolate.

CHOCS AWAY

It's been a long and (often literally) tortuous route from the discovery of the cocoa bean to its packaging in purple wrapper and foil and sale in petrol stations. The complexities involved in the making of chocolate will be addressed in due course, as will the way it is wrapped.

At this point, it's enough to establish that we're talking about a particular product that can be made from the fruit of the cacao tree, a tree indigenous to the tropical climes of Central and South America. It is exactly the same as the cocoa tree but just that simple difference in spelling and pronunciation alone establishes you as someone with a greater depth of knowledge. As for when you should use cocoa/cacao to describe the product, the words are increasingly interchangeable. If you really want to impress, you can say that some conventions dictate that the beans are called cacao, while the powder that can be made from them is cocoa; but, in most cases, feel free to use either.

Leave the chocolate-making process until later and let's start at the very beginning. The journey thus begins

some 4,000 years ago with the Olmecs, the first major civilisation in what would later become Mexico.

It is perhaps worth pointing out here that, as with so much ancient history, there are contradictory dates and stories. For many, that would be frustrating. For the bluffer, though, such vagueness is manna from heaven. Even if you have a particularly vociferous expert desperately looking for the flaws in your story, you can laugh off their allegations with practised nonchalance and a well-placed 'Well, yes, according to some sources…' or 'I think the jury's still out on that one.'

THE OLMECS

According to some evidence, the Olmecs may have been the first civilisation in the Western Hemisphere to develop a system of writing. They're also said to have been the first to invent zero, calendars, bloodletting and human sacrifice; think of them as accountants gone bad. More importantly, they're thought to be the first known people to consume cacao beans, in around 600BC. The Aztecs and Mayans may have had chocolate bars named after them, but they came later. The Olmecs should probably have a word with their legal team about that.

The Olmecs were around from 1200BC until approximately 400BC – before dying out or moving on, possibly due to volcanic activity in the region or too many virgin sacrifices. Nobody's particularly sure what happened, but evidence suggests that they were the first to discover the delicious potential of the cacao bean:

probably because their home was full of cacao trees, and excess is as much a mother of invention as necessity.

DRINKING CHOCOLATE

At this point, and for around the next two millennia, chocolate, or *xocoatl*, as certain records suggest it was called (don't even try to pronounce it), was consumed as a drink. It actually translates as 'bitter water' which doesn't make it sound terribly appetising – unless you're a fan of beer or Angostura, of course.

This is a point on which other experts may attempt to correct you, so be prepared. The American linguist William Bright argued that there's no evidence of *xocoatl* or *chocolatl* or any of the other possible spellings being used as a word at this time in history. It's possible, then, that our modern word comes from *chokol*, the Mayan word for 'hot', and *atl*, the word for 'water'. Others claim that the Aztec word *cacahuatl* ('cacao water') is the derivation. The latter has strong possibilities, particularly once the Spanish got involved. They'd have been unlikely – as anyone would – to have drunk a thick, brown liquid that had the word 'caca' in its name because, as any schoolboy knows, in Spanish that means 'poo' (or fecal matter if you're an adult). The theory, then, is that the Spanish substituted 'chokol' to make things somewhat more appetising.

For the sake of clarity, you'd probably be better sticking with the first version but do, of course, keep the others in your bluffing vocabulary. Drinking *xocoatl* (oh, alright, try pronouncing it 'hoch-co-atal' if you insist) was a

practice that continued for many centuries – chocolate wasn't actually eaten in bar form until the nineteenth century – from the Mayans (when they weren't busy incorrectly predicting the end of the world) to the Aztecs and beyond.

THE MAYANS

The Mayans, as acknowledged by the Green & Black's bar named after them, were probably the first culture to fully embrace *xocoatl* and its health benefits. As the Mayans would have discovered, *xocoatl* was good for combating fatigue and as a stimulant in general. For the purposes of full pontificating, you may wish to note that there is a small amount of caffeine in the cacao bean but a greater amount of theobromine, a mild stimulant of the central nervous system that increases your serotonin levels; that's why eating chocolate makes you feel good.

The Mayans made *xocoatl* an integral part of their society and religion, a belief that continued with the Toltecs and the Aztecs, and even as far along as Carl von Linnaeus, the eighteenth-century Swedish scientist who gave the tree its Latin name, *Theobroma cacao*, which translates as 'food of the gods'. The Toltecs believed that cacao was a divine gift from the god Quetzalcoatl. Legend has it that Quetzalcoatl was banished by the other gods for giving man the gift of cacao, but had sworn to return. Remember that; it will come up again.

THE AZTECS

Next up, and also loving the bean, were the Aztecs. They had a mighty empire – some 15 million people between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries – and held cacao in such high regard that the beans were used as currency, a practice that lasted in Central America until the nineteenth century. According to some contemporary accounts, a slave could be purchased for around 100 beans, four would get you a rabbit and around 10 would secure the services of someone in – ahem – the world's oldest profession; it appears, then, that some people have always done anything for chocolate.

Because of the value of the beans, the drink was the privilege of the upper classes, with the Aztec emperor Montezuma II – who has also been remembered by the chocolate manufacturers of today – rumoured to consume up to 50 cups of *xocoatl* a day, often before visiting his harem of wives. Whether cacao works as a Viagra substitute is debatable – scientists have argued it both ways, and we'll take a look at that in a later chapter – but if it worked for Montezuma…

ARRIVAL IN EUROPE

Cacao became Montezuma's downfall in the incident that ultimately brought the bean to Europe. In 1519, Spanish explorer Hernán Cortés arrived in the Aztec capital Tenochtitlán and met with Montezuma. Montezuma was convinced that this exotic fellow, with his fairer skin and beard, had to be Quetzalcoatl returning from his banishment and thus showered the explorer with many

gifts, including cacao. Giving this foreigner cacao was a decision that didn't go down well with Montezuma's people, who revolted and killed the emperor. As it happens, the masses were better judges of character than Montezuma as Cortés and the Spanish then went on to destroy most of the Aztec nation.

Cortés brought cacao back to the Spanish court in 1527. Due to high taxes, once again the drink it made became the privilege of the upper classes, and less a mystery and more a complete secret as far as the rest of the world was concerned. According to some reports, Sir Francis Drake certainly had no idea what it was or its value; when he and his men captured Spanish galleons and discovered sacks full of cacao beans, they declared them useless and threw them overboard. Would the course of history have been different if they'd known what their booty comprised? Would Drake and his men have returned to the Spanish Main to plunder more of the magic cacao beans, and would they have thus missed the bunfight with the Armada in 1588? Was Pope Sixtus V (who gave the Spanish aggressors his blessing) a Catholic? These are all points for the bluffer to bear in mind in any discussion about the history of chocolate.

CHOCOLATE SPREADS

It wasn't until the seventeenth century that, with the marriage of Anne of Austria, daughter of Philip III of Spain, to Louis XIII of France, cacao started to spread across the rest of Europe. Around the same time, the medicinal properties of the drink had brought it to the

attention of missionaries, and word spread across more of South and Central America and parts of Europe. Religion would also come to play a greater part in chocolate's evolution in the coming years.

Chocolate finally came to England – hurrah – in the mid-seventeenth century. Once again – you've guessed it – taxes meant that it was the rich who got to enjoy the drink. From 1657, chocolate houses sprang up across London as meeting places for the elite. Some of these, where men gathered to discuss politics and the pressing matters of the day over a cup of the brown stuff, later evolved into gentlemen's clubs.

INFLUENCE OF THE QUAKERS

For the next two centuries, chocolate remained as a drink famed for its various health benefits and mood-enhancing qualities. The fact that it did this without the presence of alcohol made it enormously attractive to the Quakers, something that would soon help shape the future of chocolate even further.

Because of their beliefs, Quaker career choices were somewhat limited, but medical professions were certainly permitted. Accordingly, many Quakers became doctors and apothecaries, and chocolate, with its famed/fabled health benefits, played a large part in their medicine chests. With the government reducing the import duty on cacao in the 1850s, and gin becoming increasingly popular among the population, the Quakers were also happy to have found something that they saw as a viable alternative

to the demon drink. Three of the country's leading Quakers of the time were particularly eager to extol the virtues of this wonder substance. Their names? Prepare to be surprised: George Cadbury, Joseph Rowntree and Joseph Storrs Fry.

In 2011, the UK chocolate confectionery market was worth a little under £4 billion.

Beyond the products that bear their names today, Cadbury, Rowntree and Fry made a vast contribution to British society. The high cost of chocolate meant that much of what had been sold before was adulterated with all sorts of alien substances – animal, vegetable and mineral. With the reduction in taxes and the Quaker involvement, that practice stopped.

The three Quakers also revolutionised working conditions. Cadbury created Bournville – the place (not the plain chocolate just yet) – as a utopia for his workers, swiftly followed by Rowntree and Fry, who gave their workers the best possible living and working conditions for the time. You could argue, then – or at least drop casually into the conversation – that chocolate has traditionally worked towards the common good and made people feel better in many ways beyond its physical effects.

GROWTH OF TECHNOLOGY

So, now there's a drink with certain health benefits, workers with better conditions than ever before, a dead emperor, extinct civilisations and the start of assorted men's clubs. What there isn't yet is something recognisable as a bar of chocolate. The stuff was still mainly in liquid form.

Around the same time that chocolate was gaining a foothold across Europe as a drink, things were happening that would take it to the form we know and love. A useful point to drop into conversations is just how much we consume. It changes from year to year but, according to the most recently available figures, in 2011 the UK chocolate confectionery market was worth a little under £4 billion.

Some key milestones were reached in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to take chocolate from a drink – and often a fatty, gritty drink at that – to the smoother, more refined chocolate that we drink and eat today.

Key to this was the invention of the cocoa press by Dutch chemist Conrad van Houten. When preparing chocolate, one of the problems people found was that cocoa butter rose to the top of the liquid, meaning that the drink had to be skimmed regularly or the fat had to be boiled off. Van Houten wanted to find a better way to remove this fat. It was a fine idea but it wasn't a quick process; van Houten began his research in 1815 but it wasn't until 1828 that he finally figured out what was going on and subsequently patented his invention.

The van Houten press separated the fat from the

chocolate liquor – we'll come to that in due course, but it's basically pure chocolate in its liquid form – leaving what we know as cocoa powder. Van Houten added potash to the powder, which made it darker in appearance, easier to mix and reduced the bitterness, giving the cocoa a milder flavour. This process, the alkalisation of cocoa, is still known today as 'Dutching' – possibly not the memorial van Houten was expecting, but at least it's a small acknowledgement, and he's still doing better than the Olmecs.

Thanks to the Dutching process, the famed chocolate drink could now be made more easily – and better tasting – just by adding water. It could also be produced on a grand scale, reducing the costs and making it accessible to everyone. It also led to the first 'modern' chocolate bar in 1847, courtesy of Joseph Fry.

By blending powdered cocoa with cocoa butter and sugar, Fry found that you could make a paste that could be easily shaped. Before this discovery, chocolate bars had existed but they needed to be dissolved in milk or water before they could be consumed. Fry's breakthrough was a bar you could eat without any further treatment. His reward – despite giving his bar the unwieldy name of '*chocolat délicieux à manger*' – was to see his company become the world's largest chocolate manufacturer.

It wasn't just in Britain and Holland where chocolate technology was leaping forward. The reason the Swiss are so often associated with fine chocolate today is down to their influence around the same time, particularly in the

field of chocolate production.

While Fry discovered a method of mixing ingredients to make bars by hand, the Swiss found a way to do it by machine. The piece of equipment that combines cocoa paste and sugar into a smooth blend is known as a *mélangeur* and the invention is credited to Philippe Suchard. You might recognise the name.

The creation of milk chocolate – in 1875 – is also credited to the Swiss. It's made by adding powdered milk to the cocoa mixture and, interestingly, it's the chemist who worked out how to powder milk that is remembered rather than the chocolate maker who combined the ingredients for the first time. The chocolate maker was Swiss, one Daniel Peter. You might not recognise the name, but you may be more familiar with that of his German head chemist – Henri Nestlé. In the same year, Fry's also launched its remoulded cream-filled bar (orginally created in 1866), a definite acquired-taste product that is still available today.

Also in the same year, another Swiss man with a familiar name, Rodolphe Lindt, discovered 'conching'. All bluffers need to be aware of this step change in the production of chocolate, and it will be discussed at length in the next chapter. For now, all you need to know is that it's basically the process where chocolate loses its natural graininess and becomes the smooth, creamy product we know and buy so much of today. According to chocolate-making legend, Lindt discovered the process and the benefits of conching completely by accident when an employee left a machine running overnight.