

Matcha Chocolat

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Biologist-turned-Chocolatier Katie Christoffers talks about her inspiration behind her self-invented tea-infused chocolates

Biologist-turned-Chocolatier Katie Christoffers launched her online chocolate shop in March last year. She only sells a range of self-invented tea-infused chocolates, called Matcha Chocolat, with a variety of chocolates flavoured with green, black, and white teas from China, India, and Japan. Sally Maier-Yip caught up with her recently.

DS: What are tea-infused chocolates?

KC: Fresh handmade chocolates are generally a blend of chocolate, fresh cream, a bit of butter and often some other additional ingredients to lend flavour, such as spices, herbs, liqueurs, or nuts. Similarly, tea can be used to impart flavour to chocolates just like any more traditional type of flavouring. So basically a tea-infused chocolate is one where you infuse cream with a tea and then blend it with the chocolate to make a chocolate truffle for example.

Because there are so many varieties of tea, you can really get a whole range of tastes when you make tea-infused chocolates.

DS: How did the idea of tea-infused chocolates come from?

KC: I became acquainted to the culture of tea drinking when I moved from the USA to England. But, it wasn't until a fellow scientist at the University of Oxford introduced me to a Chinese green tea called 'Liu An Gua Pian' (the oldest of the 'Famous Ten' teas) that I became a real tea enthusiast. After that I really got into drinking whole leaf teas and became interested in the whole process, from tea cultivation to tea drinking.

I was particularly excited when I found the powdered green tea known as 'matcha', which is often used to flavour a variety of foods such as chocolates, cakes, cookies, etc. I really enjoyed these tea-infused sweets, but found them hard to come by, so I started making my own. Handmade chocolates soon became my favourite thing to make and I started wondering what they would be like with other types of tea. I noticed a few other chocolate makers using teas and wanted to see if I could really expand on this.

DS: What special about Matcha Chocolat?

KC: I think there are two things that really interest people about Matcha Chocolat and that is of course the flavour of the chocolates! But also the creative idea of making a special range of chocolates with an ingredient such as tea, which has not previously been used to the extent that I have in my collection.

The flavour of tea-infused chocolates benefits from the fact that both tea and chocolate possess a great diversity of flavour and aroma. When tea infusions are blended with chocolate they work by revealing and enhancing one another's subtleties of flavour. The combination really offers a diverse range of flavours from floral, fruity, and spicy to herbaceous, earthy- even smoky.

Another reason why Matcha Chocolat appeals to people is for the quality of the ingredients that I use as well as the craftsmanship and effort put into the whole process. I make sure to use high-quality chocolate that is not full of sugar. I use fresh cream and choose my teas from some of the best tea merchants in England that have direct relationships with tea growers around the world.

DS: When can we see your next innovations?

KC: I started the range with a variety of chocolates flavoured with green, black, and white teas from China, India, and Japan. One of the most popular chocolates is called 'Jasmine Silver Needles', which bears the name of the tea it is infused with. It's a white chocolate with a beautiful floral flavour and it also won 2 Gold Stars from the 2010 Great Taste Awards.

In the new year, I am looking forward to launching a selection of chocolates which focus on teas from specific areas of the world. In time for the Chinese New Year, I am delighted to have just launched the China Tea Chocolate Selection, all infused with teas from China in five flavours: Phoenix Honey Orchid, Mint & Green Tea, Lapsang Caramel, Jasmine Silver Needles and China Rose & Raspberry Caramel.

And for Easter, I will do the same, but using teas and other ingredients found in Japan.

To find out more about Matcha Chocolat, click here:

www.matchachocolat.com. Dim Sum readers can now enjoy 10% discount off the total purchase when you use the words 'dim sum' at the checkout of the online shopping cart. Valid till 31st January 2011.