

Cacao Crazy

The Sixth Annual Chocolate Show Offers Plenty of Gift Options for Mom This Year

It's been a long-standing tradition that I get my mother a box of chocolates every Mother's Day and Hanukkah. For years, that meant Godiva — until I discovered that there's a whole world of other cocoa-butter confections out there that are a lot better.

As I fine-tuned my own chocolate palate year-round, I discovered new treats for Mom: truffles and tiles and mosaics and artistically drawn works of delicate and delectable art from Richart, Leonidas, and Fauchon in Midtown and extraordinary Joseph Schmidt truffles in handmade boxes from Macy's.

So when the sixth annual Chocolate Show (chocolateshow.com) came to the Metropolitan Pavilion on West 18th Street last month, I was good and ready to discover the next great chocolate gifts for the holidays and beyond.

Founded by Sylvie Douce and François Jeantet, the Chocolate Show started in Paris as the Salon du Chocolat and has since added Tokyo to its roster. Among the advisory board members this time around were François Payard, Andrew Garrison Sheets, Jacques Torres, Martin Howard, and Claudia Fleming Hayden.

Nearly 30,000 eager chocoholics attended the four-day event, packed in like Raisinettes.

Among the standout new exhibitors was Mary's Japan (mary.co.jp), which offered a Japanese plum-seasoned flower chocolate, a kinako soybean flower truffle, and a green tea ganache ball. The tube-shaped milk ganache is dusted with cocoa powder and has a hint of Grand Marnier.

Chocolat Moderne's (chocolatmoderne.com) pumpkin pique-nique and raspberry rendezvous were excellent. Chocolatier and CEO Joan Coukos's Dark Chocolate Alchemy box is a marvel; she even adds a 23-karat-gold touch to many of her pieces.

Belgian Bernard Callebaut (bernardcallebaut.com) was proudly giving out unique creations in honor of his 20th anniversary in the business.

It's always fascinating to see what each booth puts out for free and what is available for purchase. Some give away nothing, while others are far more generous with their wares, and that of course brings more people to them.

One booth, for the second year in a row, offered tiny pieces of broken-up cookies, attracting no one. Valrhona learned its lesson last year and this time opened up some of its small tins of chocolate drops.

I'm generally a straight dark chocolate

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guy, but Fritz Knipschildt (knipschildt.com), who uses only Valrhona and Michel Cluizel chocolate in creating his masterpieces, pushed a wintry fresh all-white coconut truffle on me that was memorable.

Longtime favorite Martine's (martineschocolates.com) showed up this year, with Ms. Leventer on hand to celebrate the opening of her new store on East 82nd Street and to introduce her holiday collection, which includes Christmas trees, toy soldiers, and Santas as well as menorah pops and a chocolate chai sign.

The awesome Chocolate Bar (chocolatebar.nyc.com) had plenty of its new bars (the super dark, an intense treat, is 72 percent cacao) as well as its unique hand-thrown chocolate bowl created by Jonathan Adler; you can drink hot chocolate out of it or just fill it with whatever you'd like, but you can't eat it — it's ceramic.

I'm not sure I've ever met anyone who loves making chocolate more than Ilene C. Shane of SweetBliss (sweetbliss.com), whose clusters (a mixed medley of chocolate, nuts, caramel, jam, coconut, and other items) are remarkably satisfying in a retro way. Her Elvis Presley version includes peanut butter and banana, of course.

Dan's Chocolates (dans.com), from Boston, scored big with the splendid Razz-matazz (a dark chocolate truffle filled with raspberry puree and dusted with cocoa) and Chief Chokolada, a dark chocolate Champagne truffle that looks like a snowball. The chief himself, Dan Cunningham, donates part of every sale to charity.

Last year I named Gold Star Chocolate's Cemoi's Truffles Fantaisie best in show, but they were edged out this year by Gustoro's Gustaux truffles (gustoro.com), which have a similar melting texture and cocoa-powder dusting but a more intense flavor.

And once again, the Chocolate Show paired chocolatiers and pastry chefs with designers, resulting in an offbeat and silly fashion show, with deliciously dolled-up mannequins from the likes of Nicole Miller and Vicki Wells, Liz Lange and Nicole Kaplan, and Carmen Marc Valvo and Johnny Iuzzini. ■