

A Study of Chocolate... Bars, That Is

February means chocolate. Chocolate means comfort. Whether in the form of a cake, truffle, or mousse, chocolate boosts one's mood. Yet, the antioxidants in dark chocolate also improve heart health and mental performance.

Generally, the darker the chocolate, the greater the amount of cacao. This equates to more antioxidants to help combat disease. So, while a box of jelly filled chocolates may be tasty and fun to explore, consider these specialty dark chocolates created by U.S. based chocolatiers.

Antidote (Brooklyn, New York)

Founded in 2010 by art director, Red Thalhammer, Antidote chocolate is truly the cure for what ails you. These chocolate bars are low in sugar, packed with cacao from Ecuador, and incorporate bits of fruit and spice.

Shop online at <https://antidotechoco.com/>. Purchase a single bar for \$7.50, six for for \$43, or a full sampler of twelve for \$85.

My favorites include Coffee & Cardamom, Almond & Fennel, and Ginger. As you can see, I enjoy a savory element to my chocolates. Each bar is accompanied by a Goddess namesake and prediction, similar to a horoscope. For example, consider Ginger's description: "Aletheia, Greek Goddess of Truth & Wisdom: Lies and delusion spread like fairies in a storm but Aletheia's divine truth is the Antidote. Spicy ginger pieces channel her clarifying spirit, scrub your mind, and leave you feeling refreshed and strong." What more can you ask for from a chocolate bar?

Stonegrindz Chocolate (Scottsdale, Arizona)

Founded in 2012 by Steven Shipler and Kasey McCaslin, Stonegrindz specializes in small batch chocolates using cacao beans from Bolivia, Ecuador, and Peru.

Shop online at <https://www.stonegrindz.com/>. Purchase a single bar for \$8 or \$9, a bundle of four for \$30 or \$35, or eight for \$65.

My favorite flavor combination may come as a surprise – Cinnamon Cayenne. Who would pair the sweetness of chocolate with the punch of cayenne? Leave it to the chocolatiers from Scottsdale. This bar has notes of caramel and fudge peppered with cayenne and cinnamon. A trio of petit squares broken from this bar are the perfect accompaniment to an after dinner glass of Rhône red.

I also enjoy the Almond & Sea Salt bar. Not only does the crunch of the roasted almonds provide some texture, the sea salt also enhances the chocolate flavor.

Éclat (West Chester, Pennsylvania)

After training in chocolate houses across Europe, Master Chocolatier Christopher Curtin opened his factory and shop in 2005. Former cross country skier, Curtin creates chocolate masterpieces from truffles to mendiants (chocolate disks) to bars just up Route 202 on South High Street in West Chester.

Take a short road trip or shop online at <https://eclatchocolate.com/>. While Éclat offers the greatest variety of these three chocolatiers, my favorites are among the bars, which range from \$7 to \$9.50.

The Aleppo Chile and Pink Peppercorn bar offers a mild chile heat balanced by the sharp sweetness of pink peppercorns. A "twist" on a chocolate covered pretzel, the Dark Pennsylvania Dutch Pretzel bar is studded with Lancaster County pretzels. Again, the saltiness really brings out the chocolate's sweetness! Another favorite, the Caramelized Hazelnut bar showcases Spanish hazelnuts from Tarragona. The fact that the hazelnuts are caramelized intensifies the sweetness.

Wishing you a Happy Valentine's Day – and a month full of chocolate bars. 🍫



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