

[« Back to Articles](#)

Chocolate Meets Wine When the Traditional Meets the Modern

Every culture - ancient or modern - carries with it creation stories, with each story as different as the culture itself. But they all start at the beginning. For the Aztecs, in the beginning there was chocolate.

Just as wine has always been an essential element within the sacred rituals of Judaism, chocolate was sacred to the Aztec civilization of Central America. Ancient legends related that the god Quetzalcoatl traveled to earth on a beam of light, bringing with him a cacao tree from Paradise. He taught them how to roast and grind the cacao seeds to make a nourishing paste, and to add water and spices to make a drink called *â€œxocolâ€* (sho-ko-laht) - believed to bring universal wisdom and knowledge.

Wine and chocolate share many commonalities *â€* with both made from fruit, both undergoing a fermentation process, both delivering a wide range of flavor profiles, and both being open to a flavor range calling forth spices and fruits, nuts, flowers and herbs. Just as important, both have been considered to be sacred and central to religious beliefs and practices.

Seeking to add to my knowledge of pairing wine and chocolate, I followed the road North from my old Long Island stomping grounds, traveled up past the Cider Mill, the Muttontown Preserve and the statue of Theodore Roosevelt on horseback that stands at the entrance to the historic town of Oyster Bay. I literally stepped out of time and back into the ancient practices when I spent an afternoon there with Lee Perrotta, in her shop called *â€œThe Chocolate Lady.* For Oyster Bay's *â€œchocolate lady,* chocolate still carries the sense of the sacred *â€* in both spirit and art.

Lee spoke of her family's legacy of chocolate making *â€* and her own use of a range of traditional methods and skills that she carries onward through inheritance, talent and training. She introduced me to both her philosophy of chocolate making and her artistry in the craft. Lee's model is to tap into the nostalgia for the chocolate classics that we grew up with.

With her wide-ranging activities as a chef and an internationally renowned chocolatier, Lee also conducts wine and chocolate tastings. Lee aims to create an experience in pairing wine and chocolate *â€* reminiscent to me of the Japanese tea ceremony - it's all about slowing down and savoring the moment. She believes that absolute right or wrong answers do not exist in pairing wine and chocolate. However for your own adventures, some guidelines are useful and it helps to learn from an expert.

In the course of a tasting, to give people a range of what is possible, Lee usually pairs three wines, one white, one red, and one unexpected variety such as an ice wine, prosecco or rosÃ© with six different chocolates including milk, dark, and white. For her, one must not go directly from tasting one wine and chocolate to another. So, between each sampling the palette must be cleansed. For this purpose chocolatiers provide either plain crackers or plain selzer - Lee's preferred choice - because of its crisp clean character.

The tasting begins with milk chocolates, which Lee matches with white wines. Whites including Riesling and Sauvignon Blanc pair well with milk chocolate. Lee told me that American palettes are trained for the creaminess of milk chocolate, which you taste in the roof of your mouth, and that the sharpness of white wines cuts through the fat content. Milk chocolates with nuts in them *â€* such as almonds, hazelnuts, and walnuts - pair well with whites that are heavily oaked, like some Chardonnays. Lee also recommends chocolates flavored with orange or pear as ideal pairings with oaked whites.

When moving on to dark and bittersweet chocolates, Lee brings out the red wines. She particularly likes dark chocolates with walnuts paired with Cabernet Sauvignon, emphasizing the blend of the wine with the oils and woodiness of the nuts. Dark chocolate with Italian roasted hazelnuts, paired with Merlot, is one of her personal favorites, with the pairing of Beaujolais and dark chocolates as another favorite pairing. Lee also likes to pair white chocolate with a burgundy, balancing the intense sweetness that characterizes the American varieties of white chocolate. After the reds and whites, Lee brings out what she calls a *â€œsurprise* wine *â€* this might be a Prosecco, a rosÃ©, an ice wine or another choice.

Lee's unexpected third wine pick lends itself to unexpected pairings. She will reach into her treasure of select creations and pair ice wine with white chocolate or with 80% dark chocolate for contrast. She likes the blend of ice wine with the underlying warm spice in her crystallized ginger chocolates, she loves pairing Prosecco with both a caramel milk chocolate and bittersweet chocolate.

Wines have endless variety in flavor and aroma and texture. They are warm and spicy, light or full-bodied, sharp or round, crisp, tart, astringent, and filled with fruit, oak, vanilla and butter. They can glow, they can bite and they can sparkle. Expert winemakers build these qualities into their wines *â€* creating a world of endless interest.

Chocolate too has endless interest and variety. Chocolate melts, cracks, and flows and as Lee says, it can also sparkle. Her chocolates abound with her own brand of sparkle - both sweet and savory, some smooth and some crunchy, with nuts, ginger, citrus, coffee, caramel, jellies, cordials, fruits, and creams, saffron, teas, chipotle peppers - all revealed as layers of flavor in her complex creations.

In Lee's shop there is no end to the range of possibilities available to delight the palette, both for wine pairing or the sheer enjoyment of the finest in handmade chocolate. When you are in the market for chocolate nostalgia, visit her shop. You'll find chocolate paradise, with fillings of classic rose and lavender creams, caramel maple, and toasted coconut. Just as a quick start, try her almond, papaya and espresso barks and her boysenberry bark that crackles on the tongue.

For your next wine and chocolate pairing count on *â€œThe Chocolate Lady* to supply your exploration with endless variety and hours of enjoyment.

All of Lee's chocolate creations are Kosher.

The Chocolate Lady Boutique
49 Audrey Avenue
Oyster Bay, NY 11771