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PARIS

Sweeten's Up



WINE BARS AND MICHELIN STARS, *BIEN SÛR*, BUT PARIS' RENEGADE CHOCOLATIER'S ARE ALL THE RAGE THESE DAYS, AND NOTHING'S MORE INDULGENT THAN SEEING WHO'S UP TO SNUFF. TIME TO PUT YOUR PERSONAL TRAINER ON SPEED DIAL.

By David Hochman

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROBERTO FRANKENBERG



ven after a giddy tour of Paris' top chocolate shops, with tastings everywhere along the way, Chloé Doutroussel goes misty-eyed over a final plate of bonbons.

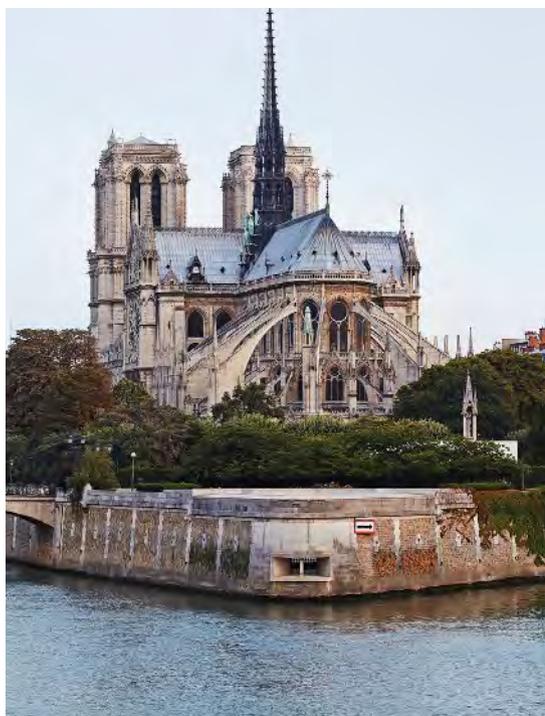
But these aren't just any chocolates: "The association of aromas touches your soul," she says, selecting a perfect square of nougatine at Pierre Hermé's boutique on avenue de l'Opéra. "Just like a beautiful

piece of music, it gives you goose bumps."

As if she had to tell us. My wife is a professional chocolate maker in Los Angeles, and we've designed this Paris visit as a holy pilgrimage of sorts. Chocolate first arrived in

Paris in 1615 for the marriage of Louis XIII and Anne of Austria – it was strictly for aristocrats back then – but in the last decade or so, a focus on carefully sourced ingredients, presentation, and one-upmanship has elevated the city's chocolate scene to a level usually associated with French names like Chanel and Cartier.

To help plot our delicious itinerary, we turned to Découvertes, specialists in custom French cultural and culinary quests, and dropped our bags at Mandarin Oriental, Paris, where the sweets are as tempting as the accommodations. Executive pastry chef Pierre Mathieu turns out some of the flakiest, tastiest *pains au chocolat* in town, and the hotel, on elegant rue Saint-Honoré – a street named for the patron saint of bakers and pastry chefs – is



located within easy walking distance of the key chocolate stops.

Our morning began with a lively tasting class at the hotel arranged and led by Doutre-Roussel, who wrote *The Chocolate Connoisseur* and now guides for chocolate obsessives like us. She delivered a brief PowerPoint talk on the three phases of chocolate eating (“It starts with the feeling of sparkles on the tongue”) and made sure we knew our marzipan from our *mendiants*. Nobody’s more consumed by chocolate – she’s so highly regarded among Paris chocolatiers that Hermé named a chocolate *tablette* in her honor. “I told Pierre I don’t like raspberry ganache, so he created the Chloé bar to prove me wrong,” she says.

Hermé, a fourth-generation baker who opened his first Parisian boutique in the Saint-Germain-des-Prés neighborhood in 2001, was among the first in Paris to give chocolate the haute couture treatment. His confections, spotlighted in jewel cases and lavish window displays, look almost too elegant to eat. Almost. Hermé’s success – he now has dozens of shops from Paris to Tokyo – helped spark the current battle among Paris chocolate makers. It’s a contest that’s as much about the poetic possibilities of the cocoa bean as it is about commerce (this is France, after all).

We experienced some of that poetry at the shop of Jean-Paul Hévin, who trained alongside chef Joël Robuchon. Hévin has made his name with chocolate fillings both tasty and outrageous (Camembert cheese? Really?). At a sleek, cocoa-colored bar in the back, we sampled bonbons with flavors of exotic pedigree: smoky Earl Grey tea, Brazilian coffee, Costa Rican citrus. Then there’s the chocolate stiletto that Hévin modeled after a high-heeled pump by French shoe designer Rodolphe Menudier. As Doutre-Roussel says with a gleam, “Particularly in Paris, chocolate and shoes go together. They’re part of an endless pursuit of elegance and luxury.”

PERFECTION FIGURES IN TOO – THE French take their chocolate artistry seriously. Every three or four years the best of the chocolate-making best compete in

a rigorous contest for the title of Un des Meilleurs Ouvriers de France, or MOF, an honor bestowed in front of the French president and signified by a red, white, and blue chef’s collar the recipient proudly wears for life.

Patrick Roger lets out a self-effacing puff of air when I ask how it felt to don the collar he won for the first time in 2000. “It didn’t change anything about life,” he says. “I continued to commit myself to what’s good and what’s beautiful.”

Roger, who grew up poor and says he didn’t eat chocolate until he was 18, is now the epitome of the Paris chocolatier as rock star. With an unkempt mane of hair and a fleet of Ducati motorcycles – “I have no idea how many I have,” he says with a laugh – Roger comes across as a renegade

Jean-Paul Hévin offers a chocolate Eiffel Tower. Opposite: Notre Dame and Pierre Hermé’s palette.





Top row: Debaube & Gallais has tempted Parisians for more than two centuries.
Middle row: Patrick Roger, his chocolate orangutan, and Chloé Doutre-Roussel in front of his chocolate hippo.
Bottom row: Jean-Paul Hévin's edible stiletto, counter, and (opposite) window display.



"Particularly in Paris, chocolate and shoes go together. They're part of an endless pursuit of elegance and luxury."

Paris' Chocolate Kings

FOR THE BEST OF THE CITY'S CHOCOLATE SCENE, START HERE.

Pierre Hermé

Multiple locations, including
39 avenue de l'Opéra;
www.pierreherme.com.

Jean-Paul Hévin

231 rue Saint-Honoré;
www.jphevin.com.

Patrick Roger

Multiple locations,
including 12 cité
Berryer Village Royal;
www.patrickroger.com.

Sadaharu Aoki

35 rue de Vaugirard;
www.sadaharuaoaki.com.

Pierre Marcolini

Multiple locations,
including 3 rue Scribe;
www.marcolini.be.

Jacques Genin

133 rue de Turenne;
jacquesgenin.fr.

even as he sets new standards for the perfect sugar high. His hyperchic boutiques have dark tinted glass to shield the astonishing chocolate window sculptures from sunlight. Today's creation at his Village Royal shop is a ferocious-looking chocolate hippo, though the real danger is wanting to gobble every gorgeous candy in sight. Roger is well known for his creamy *couleurs*, small half domes of brightly colored chocolate. He hands us samples of one called Amazon and waits for our reaction. Chocolate melds into salted caramel, which oozes into tangy Brazilian lime, our tongues sparkling all the way. Roger senses our deep satisfaction. "This is what motivates me," he says. "The emotion that the taste brings out."

Parisians' taste for chocolate goes back centuries, and it's said that more than 300 chocolate shops dot the Seine. On the Left Bank, Debaube & Gallais has sold bonbons to residents – Balzac and Proust among them – for more than 200 years. More recently, Lenôtre, Leonidas, and La Maison du Chocolat reigned as chocolatiers supreme. The new crop of masters plays up tradition but mostly just to trump it. Tokyo-born chef Sadaharu Aoki, a purveyor of sugary minimalism, makes truffles, but in the shape of colorful pastel pencils. Jean-Charles Rochoux molds chocolate into classical statuary and exotic animals. The fashion industry lends inspiration too. Belgian chocolate maker Pierre Marcolini introduced the idea of summer, winter, and holiday "collections." Last Easter, his shops sold out of his modernist "flat egg," a sleek panel of single-origin dark chocolate with an egg sensuously pressing through in bas-relief.

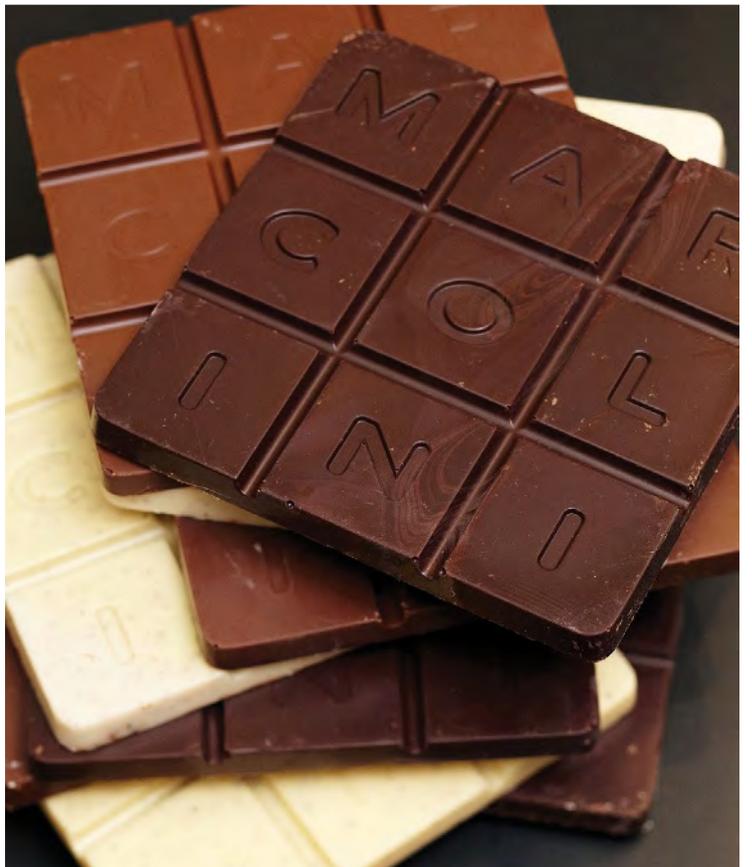
MY WIFE LOVES FINE CARAMELS, and perhaps nobody in Paris – maybe even the world – does them finer than Jacques Genin. Self-trained and famously bombastic, Genin began his food career in a slaughterhouse. He worked his way up the pastry line

to become head pâtissier at La Maison du Chocolat and was soon providing chocolates for 200 top restaurants and hotels around France. Today, as he bounds around his busy upstairs atelier in the Marais district, his apprentices jumping at every "oui" and "non," it's clear this "outsider" is no longer on the outs. In many ways, La Chocolaterie de Jacques Genin feels like the center of the chocolate world.

Silky swaths of caramel are spread on tables and hand-cut into little rectangles before going out to appreciative consumers. But it's downstairs in Genin's boutique and café where my wife and I tap the mother lode. Genin carefully guards the recipes to more than 40 caramel flavors, from cinnamon and ginger to tonka, a flowery spice banned in the U.S. for its traces of toxins (in small doses like these, it's fine – scrumptious, in fact). We sample as many flavors as we possibly can, though, at \$65 a pound, Genin's sweet treats demand some fortitude.



Small wonders: Jacques Genin's caramels. Opposite, from top: Genin and his storefront and Pierre Marcolini's creations.



Advisor Tip

“Opposite the Tuileries Gardens on rue de Rivoli, belle époque Angelina tea-room serves the city’s most decadent hot chocolate and scrumptious desserts. Coco Chanel was a daily regular at table 10, where she sat facing a mirror so she could discreetly people-watch.”

– Sandy Cutrone, Ronkonkoma, New York-based travel advisor

Master class: Paule Caillat crafts a caramel and (right) a Patrick Roger gift box.

After a few days of chocolate tasting, it’s only natural to move on to something else—like chocolate *making*. One morning, we meet Paule Caillat, who teaches patisserie in her landmark building in the Marais. Finding a three-hour chocolate-making class in Paris might sound easy, but it’s not. Pastry schools generally require a commitment of several weeks or months, and it’s not the French way for a top chef to sideline as a baking instructor. But Caillat and her longtime friend and cooking partner, Betty Edery Bitton, are experienced and charming, and their intimate master classes are intense, informative, and fun. My wife picks up a new way to make caramel that turns out not to be new at all. “These are very old, very traditional Parisian techniques,” Caillat says. “It’s one of the many secrets to why there’s so much deliciousness here.”

So much deliciousness, so little time. It would require a lifetime to know all there is to know about Paris chocolate and a second lifetime to sample every praline, *gianduja*, and ganache in sight. Even so, it’s worth the attempt. If nothing else, make a one-stop-shop visit to Lafayette Gourmet inside Galeries Lafayette, which has one of the city’s biggest arrays of chocolate at good prices.

Back at Pierre Hermé’s tasting counter, Dautre-Roussel has us sampling yet another remarkable morsel—a square of dark chocolate topped with flecks of fine *fleur de sel*. After so much chocolate, it feels gluttonous. “Last one, I promise,” she says with an irresistible smile. “Any more and it’s almost too much.” Perhaps that’s true, but as that bite ends, my wife and I are the ones with goose bumps.



Come to the Dark Side

How to make a Parisian chocolate pilgrimage of your own.



Tastemakers: Mandarin Oriental's Cake Shop and (right) the Shangri-La Hotel, Paris.

Getting There **Air France** flies direct to Paris-Charles de Gaulle from nine U.S. gateways (plus two more with partner **Delta Air Lines**). Passengers flying between Paris and Los Angeles, New York (JFK), and Washington, D.C., make the trip on spacious new Airbus A380s.

Go Chloé Doutre-Roussel kicks off **Découvertes'** indulgent taste of Paris with a tour of the city's prestigious chocolate shops. The privately guided three-day trip features visits to wine bar Caves Legrand and Debaube & Gallais – Napoleon's official chocolatier, which began selling "health chocolates" more than two centuries ago – as well as a chef-led class on preparing ganache, chocolate macaroons, and more. Not everything goes straight to your waistline: Guided tours of Île de La Cité, the Jacquemart-André Museum, and Palais Garnier (opera house) feed the mind too. *Departures: Any day February 1 through April 30, 2013; from \$6,410, including accommodations at 81-room Hôtel Fouquet's Barrière.*

Pack your sweet tooth for **Chocolatine's** four-day cacao binge (despite its name, the company specializes in anything France, not just chocolate). The trip includes accommodations at 28-room Hotel Esprit Saint Germain and three days of privately guided gourmet walks and tastings at the top chocolatiers and patisseries, plus a family-friendly cooking class in a Paris apartment. *Departures: Any day through April 30, 2013; from \$6,035.*

Stay Check-in can wait. Head straight downstairs to **Mandarin Oriental, Paris'** Cake Shop to sample the puff pastry Le Saint-Honoré. In the 99 rooms and 39 suites above, designer Sybille de Margerie fashioned urban sanctuaries with art deco lines and touches such as freestanding tubs and TVs that glow behind mirrors. Chef Thierry Marx's Sur Mesure restaurant off the lobby is one of the hottest reservations in town. *Doubles from \$990, including breakfast daily and a \$100 spa credit.*

A five-minute walk from the Trocadéro and with Eiffel Tower views beyond imagination, the **Shangri-La Hotel, Paris** is the former home of Napoleon's grandnephew, Prince Roland. Its 81 rooms are faithful to history (the emperor's iconic gold-leaf bees appear throughout) while bowing to modish "necessities" such as rain showers, Bang & Olufsen technology, and heated floors. Feeling like Chinese? Shang Palace, downstairs, earned a Michelin star. *Doubles from \$808, including breakfast daily and a \$100 dining credit.*

Discreet **La Réserve, Paris** offers ten one- to three-bedroom apartments with Eiffel Tower views on place du Trocadéro and a staff that includes a concierge, valets, and optional private chefs, as well as housekeepers to run your errands for the ultimate freedom about town. *Doubles from \$2,345, including breakfast daily and a 50-minute massage for two. VI.*