Beer and chocolate: two of Belgium’s flagship products, now brought together by a Fleming with a day job in aviation and a sideline in food and drink.

Werner Callebaut spent two years training as a chocolatier, followed a few years later by a course to become a beer sommelier. “I’m one of the few people in Belgium who studied to specialise in both beer and chocolate,” he says. “I started doing pairing events for beer clubs and it was such a success that I set up my own company, more as a hobby than anything.”

[He now offers courses](http://www.bierolade.be) in matching beer and chocolate, as well as more general introductions to the two for experts and amateurs, including brewery tours, tastings and private events. In his pairing sessions, he provides two beers for each chocolate: one in harmony and one in contrast, to illustrate how the flavour profiles work together.

Examples of beer and chocolate in harmony: the new Duvel Tripel Hop and a dark praline with a ganache of red pepper and Japanese yuzu; a Liefmans Goudenband or a Rodenbach Grand Cru, sour beers that match ideally with a white praline filled with dark chocolate ganache and cuberdon.

“I’m not talking about using beer to make chocolate, or chocolate to make beer, I’m talking about matching existing products,” Callebaut says. “Beer and chocolate make each other better. Until recently, nobody was doing anything in this area, but now I really think this will be the year of beer and chocolate.”

Back in 2013, chocolate maker Valentino joined forces with Anders brewery to [create a new beer](http://www.flanderstoday.eu/living/beer-and-chocolate-finding-perfect-blend) specifically to match one of their chocolates. This year, they were at the Salon du Chocolat in Brussels with several existing beers and a selection of pralines, Callebaut explains.

“They had Hoegaarden, which was paired with a dark praline with Cointreau. The orange peel you find in Hoegaarden is also in Cointreau,” he says. “Then you had a milk chocolate with nougat; it went perfectly with a Barbar, which has a subtle honey taste, and there was a buttercream truffle matched with Sint Bernardus Abt 12, a dark beer with a creamy background.”

More and more, he says, chocolate makers are looking into matching their product with beer. “It’s the ultimate seduction. The quality of beer and chocolate is so obvious; we don’t question it because we’ve always known it. It’s always been a trademark for our country.”