

Chocolate Delirium





There are different types of bitterness in chocolate. Sometimes it's harsh and astringent, like when it's made from cocoa beans taken from the Ivory Coast; these are some of the cheapest available. Sometimes it's softer, yet at the same time more impactful and longer lasting, like with chocolate made with cocoa beans from Ecuador, or the Congo. It's a bit like the difference between quickly made astringent IPAs, and beers such as XX Bitter, which have a more comprehensive, but less astringent bitterness."

As beer and chocolate expert Werner Callebaut explains to us, beer and chocolate have a lot in common with each other, and the similarities come to the fore when paired together.

So, this evening we find ourselves in Delirium Café Brussels, and Werner's task is to identify some pairings to go with the beers from the Delirium/Huyghe brewery.

But before we get to that, here are some pointers on how beer and chocolate should be tasted. First take a sip

of beer to clear the palette, then take a bite of chocolate, then another sip of beer and try to experience both in the mouth at the same time. It's a simple piece of advice, but one that pays dividends later on.

You'll know that the pairing is a success if the beer and chocolate flavors either complement each other - when the flavor of the chocolate highlights a similar flavor in the beer -, or if they contrast - for instance if a fatty sweetness in a chocolate contrasts with a refreshing bitterness in the beer.

What's important though is that the flavours should be of equal intensity, one shouldn't dominate over the other.

Now that we have some background, what are the best chocolates to pair with Huyghe's beers. Starting out with Delirium, you get refreshing yet classic Belgian flavors, ripe banana and a touch of clove and spice. It's a classic and so sometimes taken for granted, so Werner and I are reminded once again of how good it is.

All of the chocolates are from Valentino Chocolates, and the first one

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that Werner chooses to pair with Delirium is called Sonia, it's a chocolate praline with fruity hazelnut cream. What's clear is that both chocolate and beer hit the bar for having equally intense flavors, and both can co-exist in the mouth at the same time. However, there's nothing that goes beyond this, no additional synergy so we move on to another chocolate.

This time it's Banoffee a milk chocolate praline with banana and toffee. This takes us to the next level with the banana flavors in the chocolate, perfectly picking out the banana flavor in the beer.

Next up it's Delirium's Christmas beer which gives rich Christmas cake flavors of plum, peach and grapes. The experience includes a warming note for the alcohol. Overall it's sweet, spicy and lightly bitter.

In the mouth, one will taste very fruity flavours of plum, peach and grapes. The aftertaste is obviously warm from the presence of alcohol and even prickles the tip of the tongue. It is sweet, spicy and lightly bitter.

To emphasize and accentuate the flavours of this beer, Werner chooses Marijke, which is a hazelnut and coffee filling, surrounded by a dark chocolate exterior. This pairing is a winner from the beginning; the Hazelnut and the coffee flavors, pair well with the beer's spiciness. But the dark chocolate exterior gives the chocolate body, ensuring that it stands up to this warming, intense, full-flavored beer.

Next up we go for Delirium Red; which has a soft fruity aroma with hints of almond and mildly sour cherries. For this Werner chooses Manon Blueberry a white truffle with blueberry fresh

cream. It's a very good match between the beer and the blueberry. As Werner points out the white chocolate topping made the beer softer and the gentle acidity of the blueberry fresh cream gave an extra touch to the beer.

The final beer of the evening is La Guillotine; a Golden blond, multigrain beer with a very long lasting, lacing and head. Citrus and a fruity hoppiness dominates in the aroma and the flavor. The citrus note leads us to go for Mousse Orange, a dark chocolate with orange cream ganache, which is perfectly in balance with the beer. ■