

# Santé

## food.wine.spirits.

INSIGHTS IN HOSPITALITY™

By Matt Robinson

Once upon a time, there were few options for the romantically-inclined to express their feelings. A few colors of flowers and cardboard hearts of various sizes (filled with items of varying quality) were often all that could be found.

These days, however, the options are almost overwhelming!

That is why we at Santé have organized them so that you can make the most effective choice for wooing and winning the person(s) of your choice.

While wining and dining can be a great way to woo, especially as we are all locked in and locked down these days and many of our relationships (including potentially romantic ones) are limited to digital interfaces, it might be a good year to try something more low-key. One great option is the “Crazy for You” pizza and wings combo from Chocolate Pizza Company ([www.ChocolatePizza.com](http://www.ChocolatePizza.com)). This sweet set combines a gourmet chocolate pizza that is made with homemade English toffee and topped it with red, pink, and white chocolate candies and sugar sprinkles with a 16 oz. red tin of their famed peanut butter wings, which drench rippled potato chips in peanut butter and either milk or dark chocolate.



CHOCOLATE  
PIZZA  
COMPANY  
Inc.  
Unique. Delicious. Impressive.™

Peanut Butter

*Wings*

Crisp, rippled  
potato chips  
covered in  
creamy peanut  
butter

If you are looking to get out and about without leaving home, the Boston Public Library's Norman B. Leventhal Map Center is offering an online tour of some of the spots that have made Massachusetts a candy capitol for generations

([www.leventhalmap.org/articles/candy-tour/](http://www.leventhalmap.org/articles/candy-tour/)). From Paul Revere's house to the famed wafer-colored silo on the New England Confectionary Company (NECCO) building to the toll house in Whitman, MA where the eponymous cookie was invented, the BPL takes visitors on a tasty tour through history that will take many back to their own childhoods and also inspire them to use Valentine's Day as an excuse to revisit some old favorites.



Even though NECCO has sold their iconic building to Novartis and the Baker's Chocolate factory is now condos, the Bay State still has a lot to offer when it comes to sweets, and chocolate in particular! While the area still houses offices for Tootsie Roll and others, many of the best come from historic makers like Captain Jackson's

(<http://chocolate.oldnorth.com>) and Harbor Sweets

([www.HarborSweets.com](http://www.HarborSweets.com)), and independently-owned producers like Beth's

Chocolate ([www.bethschocolate.com](http://www.bethschocolate.com)), Purefections ([www.purefections.com](http://www.purefections.com))

Choko Spice (<https://chokospice.com>), the appropriately-named MMM...Chocolate

(<https://mmm-chocolate.com>), and the similarly well-monickered Happy

Chocolatier ([www.thehappychocolatier.com](http://www.thehappychocolatier.com)).

If you want an historic taste of the Witch City, be sure to drop by (or order from) Harbor Sweets. In addition to their legendary Sweet Sloops, Harbor recently pollinated a new collection called Gather that combines two of nature's greatest (and most healthful) delights- chocolate and honey! From caramelized honey and pomegranate molasses truffles to coconut clusters and sesame crunch dark chocolates (all of which enrobed in dark chocolate and honey), the Gather collection expands Harbor's historic menu while also opening eyes to the plight of pollinators, making them a perfect treat for you and your "honey."





Housed at the base of the even more historic Old North Church (of “One if by land” fame) Captain Jackson’s not only offers chocolate that is made as it was in Colonial days but (once we are allowed again) it also allows visitors to learn how it was heated on an open fire, ground by hand, and spiced with flavors like cinnamon, anise, and even red pepper. If you are lucky, you might even be allowed to participate!



While Paul Revere may have gotten the glory for getting word to Lexington and Concord, the people of Quincy also deserve a lot of credit for getting this country off to a strong start. In addition to being the home of both John and John Quincy Adams (after whom the Boston suburb is named), the City of Presidents also housed John Hancock. These days, its signature can be proudly seen in the creations of Purefactions, which not only include chocolate-dipped Oreos embossed with the likenesses of some of Quincy's most historic homemakers, but also their legendary  $P^2C^2$  (a combination of chocolate, caramel, peanut butter and, potato chips that MUST be tried) and the gigantic turtles known (appropriately enough) as the *Lager Tartugas*, each of which is kissed (also appropriately enough) with Sam Adams Boston Lager.



Though she may be known for more contemporary creative confections, Beth Kirsch relies on aging for her favorites too. And while she comes up with new creations every year (especially around this time), her Scotch-filled chocolates that include Aberlour 16-year old double-cask Speyside, Highland Park 18, and Talisker Storm are perennial faves. Beth also offers Cognac bonbons, if that is more your drink of choice. No matter what you choose, Beth is sure to become a friend, even if your V-Day romance ends.





As the team behind Choko Spice includes an international finance professional and a political scientist, it may be no surprise that they select only ethically-sourced ingredients from all over the world and produce international flavors that range from Chai, eggnog, and Gluehwein to Bourbon-smoked sea salt and Szechuan peppercorn with real Cape Cod cranberries. Made with coconut sugar, the bars have a lower glycemic index than the cane sugars used by other chocolate makers, so even if you try them all, you will still be able to spend some bedroom time with your beloved and not regret it all in the morning.



Named by her two-year-old, Mmm...Chocolate is the product of Israeli import Liron Gal, who was trained at the prestigious *Ecole Lenôtre* in Paris and the Barry Callebaut chocolate academy in Chicago. To make her artistic artisanal arrangements, Gal combines preservative-free premium ingredients in different flavor and texture combinations that make each hand-crafted piece truly unique. In addition to her *bouchée* collection of delicious domes and *Grand cru* kisses filled with single-origin ganaches from Madagascar, Peru, Ecuador, and elsewhere, Gal is also cooking



up caramel hearts filled with four different types of caramel and chocolate hearts filled with everything from mango and passion fruit (with an emphasis on the “passion”) to apple cider caramel and even balsamic caramel! She also has Valentines-themed gift boxes, including one that contains strawberry ganache and Pop Rocks (talk about taking me back!) and a set of sugar-free treats that are compatible with keto and diabetic diets.



In addition to offering delicious dark and milk chocolate Cubze™, the Happy Chocolatier also offers orange, mint, peanut butter, and many other fillings and flavors, each of which is happily wrapped by hand and includes an encouraging message inside (and who couldn't use a bit more encouragement these days?). What makes the Happy Chocolatier even happier is that they donate part of their proceeds to various charities that help feed those in need.





Though the African art-inspired wrappers surrounding their chocolate charms could not be further away from New England if they tried, Endangered Species Chocolate (which has the easy-to-remember URL [www.chocolatebar.com](http://www.chocolatebar.com)) donates 10% of its annual

net profits to wildlife conservation. So far, they've donated \$2.6 million to conservation efforts around the world! And if their desire to make the world a better place for all creatures were not enough, their chocolates (which range in flavor from 88% pure fairly-traded cacao to bars with cinnamon, cayenne pepper, espresso beans, and more) are delicious enough for almost any mammal to enjoy. They also have single-serving bars and bites that can help you survive an endangering day or reward yourself once you are safely back at base camp with your special someone.



If you want to help humans in Africa, Divine Chocolate may be a good choice, as they claim to be the only Fairtrade chocolate company that is co-owned by cocoa farmers (one of whom is introduced personally inside every wrapper!). A co-op of 85,000 chocolate farmers in Ghana receive over 40% of the B company's distributable profits, providing them with economic stability and increased influence in the cocoa industry. The result of this producer-owned project is a wide range of delicious chocolate flavors that are non-GMO and free of soy, palm oil, and artificial ingredients and that range in flavor from 85% dark to white chocolate with strawberries and also includes bars with hazelnuts, spiced cookies, raspberries, mint, toffee, mango, ginger, and orange. They recently released is an organic line of vegan bars with superfoods like blueberries, cocoa nibs, and turmeric. The website ([www.divinechocolate.com](http://www.divinechocolate.com)) even has tips on how to enjoy your chocolate more mindfully, and knowing the farmers benefit makes each experience even more fulfilling!





Another charitable chocolatier is Michelin-rated chef Genie Kwon, who has been helping Flair Chocolatier (<https://flairchocolatier.com>) since 2018. In addition to making use of rare ruby cacao, Kwon offers geographically-inspired ingredients that range from New York apples to Parisian pralines and Tokyo's genmai rice, each of



which will surely transport you (and your Valentine), even if you can't leave the house. And while any purchase from Flair is a treat, if you order through the Grapevine Shops ([www.grapevineshops.com](http://www.grapevineshops.com)), 10% of the proceeds go to Family Reach, which supports families dealing with cancer. Talk about doing your heart (and some else's) some good!



If you happen to find yourself alone on Valentine's Day, Delysia Chocolatier (<https://delysia.com/>) has you covered- literally! In addition to a trio of truffles that feature ingredients that have been claimed to have romantic powers over both men and women (e.g., honey, ginger, and Merlot cherries), Delysia also offers a trio of tops that tell others whether you (or someone else) are a chocolate connoisseur, chocoholic, or admitted addict.



While it can be discouraging to be alone on Valentine's Day, what might be even worse is watching everyone else gorge on sweets while your sensitive stomach and food allergies keep you out of the fun. Fortunately, many sensitive producers are answering the call.

While Schmilk chocolate ([www.schmilkchocolate.com](http://www.schmilkchocolate.com)) may sound like a Jewish mother's way to blow off the tasty treat, it is really a vegan chocolate that uses cashew nuts instead of milk. Even if you are not vegan, this stuff is delicious and can be enjoyed in more ways than many other so-called "real" chocolates! Handcrafted in VT, Schmilk chocolates come in a wide range of flavors that range from crunchy bars and indulgent peanut butter bliss bites to hazelnut truffles and roasted marshmallow "hugs" that are nearly as sweet and comforting as the real thing.



While in the 18<sup>th</sup> state, be sure to try some chocolates from Lake Champlain ([www.lakechamplainchocolates.com](http://www.lakechamplainchocolates.com)), where Valentine's Day has inspired a set of vegan truffles made with plant-based coconut milk and a cutely-contained Hearts Aflutter box of organic chocolate hearts that is perfect for children!





If you are just on a diet (as opposed to a special diet), Red Chocolate ([www.red-chocolate.com](http://www.red-chocolate.com)) may be the color for you! Though it is made by the same master European craftspeople that create many of our favorite chocolates, Red has half the calories of most, making a Valentine's Day (or ANY day) indulgence easier to bear. One piece of their all-natural and deliciously decadent-tasting dark chocolate has the same calorie count as a slice of apple(!), yet comes in such tempting varieties as extra dark, dark with orange and almond, and milk with hazelnut and macadamia, so there is something for almost everyone and less for everyone too!



Fitness expert Danette May claims that her Cacao Bliss ([www.thefitrise.com](http://www.thefitrise.com)) is truly “guilt-free” chocolate. Combining the same ceremonial-grade cacao used by indigenous peoples of South America for medicinal and spiritual practices with sweet monk fruit, cinnamon, turmeric, Himalayan salt, and inulin-injecting coconut nectar, May has concocted a delicious, healthy mix-in that helps maintain blood sugar levels, feed healthy gut bacteria, protect brain cells, and add delicious flavor to coffee, cookies, or whatever you add it to. It is also certified organic, has no added sugar, complies with vegan, paleo, and keto diets, and comes in an eco-friendly package that makes it even appropriate as a gift (or just a gift to yourself).



Another way to justify your chocolate binge is by sneaking it into your diet. One of my favorite ways to do this is by seeking out Undercover Chocolate ([www.undercoverchocolate.com](http://www.undercoverchocolate.com)) which enrobes quinoa in milk or dark chocolate and adds in such other superfoods as blueberries and healthy seeds. And to make them even more allowable, Undercover comes in single-serve packs that you can keep hidden almost anywhere!





Speaking of healthy chocolate, there is no better option out there than Flava Naturals ([www.flavanaturals.com](http://www.flavanaturals.com)), which pack up to nine times the average amount of heart-healthy flavanols into each bar and their chocolate powder which makes a perfectly romantic cup of cocoa that will help your heart in more ways than one! Like Undercover, Flava Naturals pack such healthy helpers as blueberries, green tea, almonds, ginger, and Saigon cinnamon in their bars and even offer a 10-day diet protocol that is sure to help you get back on track after any V-Day binges.





500mg  
cocoa flavanols

**FlavaBar**  
chocolate for life.

Roasted Almond + Himalayan Pink Salt

2 daily serving chocolate bars  
62% cacao

2.6 OZ (74g) NET WT 2.6 OZ (74g)

500mg  
cocoa flavanols

**FlavaBar**  
chocolate for life.

Espresso Ground Coffee

2 daily serving chocolate bars  
62% cacao

2.6 OZ (74g) NET WT 2.6 OZ (74g)

**FlavaBar**  
chocolate for life.

500mg  
cocoa flavanols

**FlavaBar**  
chocolate for life.

Pure Cocoa Nibs

2 daily serving chocolate bars  
82% cacao

2.6 OZ (74g) NET WT 2.6 OZ (74g)

500mg  
cocoa flavanols

**FlavaBar**  
chocolate for life.

Crystallized Ginger + Saffron Cinnamon

2 daily serving chocolate bars  
62% cacao

2.6 OZ (74g) NET WT 2.6 OZ (74g)

500mg  
cocoa flavanols

**FlavaBar**  
chocolate for life.

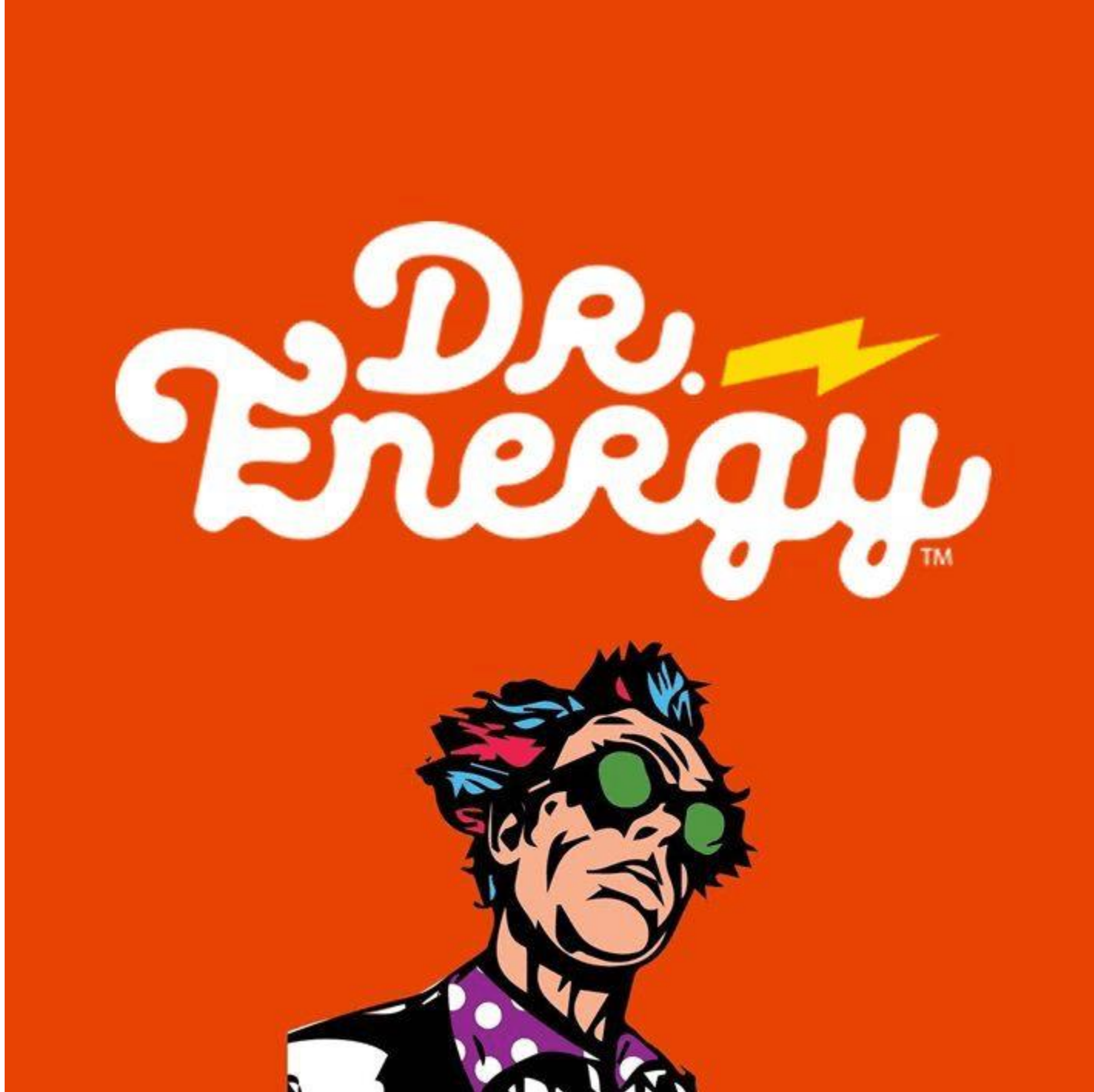
Blueberry + Green Tea Matcha

2 daily serving chocolate bars  
62% cacao

2.6 OZ (74g) NET WT 2.6 OZ (74g)



If you need help simply waking up after your big serotonin splurge, world-famous Amano Chocolates has come up with tasty truffles that are just what the doctor ordered. In fact, they are called Dr. Energy (<https://drenergymfuel.com>). Packed with ethically-traded green coffee power, they come in plain (but delicious) chocolate and chocolate mint, so you can get the sensation whenever you need a jolt.



While for many, Valentine's Day is an excuse to go over the top to prove their love for others, it can also be a time to take care of the earth and its inhabitants and also to take

care of yourself. No matter who you want to care for, however, chocolate is surely a good bet!

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### **ABOUT MATT ROBINSON**

Matt Robinson has been writing about food (and various other passions and interests) for nearly 20 years. His work has appeared in over 120 international publications, including AAA Horizons, Billboard, Boston Magazine, The Boston Red Sox, Business Traveler, The Dallas Observer, Entrepreneur, The Forward, JazzUSA, Luxury Web, Music Dish, The Philadelphia Inquirer, Rolling Stone, and Where. His restaurant reviews and “Chef Chat” interview columns have appeared all over the world.

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