

# Sacred Cacaos

After dinner, head to one of these swanky sweet spots. *by Aarti Jhaveri*

JUST WHEN THE CITY IS BANNING trans fat, New Yorkers are rediscovering their sweet tooth. Chocolatiers have popped up in nearly every hood, offering elegant and deliciously decadent options this Valentine's Day.

## CHOCOLATE BY THE BALD MAN: MAX BRENNER

(841 Broadway, 212-388-0030)

Max Brenner finally brought his chocolate wonderland—a dessert chain that has its roots in Australia—to our very own Union Square. There's little this café/bar's menu doesn't tackle, from waffles to pastries to signature cocktails. Brenner describes his relationship with chocolate as "a love story." Don't we all?



Chocolate by the Bald Man.

## JACQUES TORRES CHOCOLATE HAVEN

(350 Hudson Street at King Street, 212-414-2462)

The reception area is an Aztec temple, the chandelier-festooned bar is à la Louis the XVI, and the chocolate is out of this world. Stroll through this treatery and there's a good chance you'll bump into the charismatic Jacques Torres himself. He spends a good part of the week in his West Village factory/store, chatting up customers, offering them samples of his original malt balls, and overseeing production.

## MARIEBELLE

(484 Broome Street, 212-925-6999)

We're not sure if it's the Aztec hot chocolate's ceremonial blue-and-gold tins or the mirrors that line the café walls, but everything about this intimate space and popular meeting spot screams Eastern European royalty. Want to learn which treats go best with beverages like coffee, tea, and wine? Try MarieBelle's chocolate-tasting program.



## MARTINE'S CHOCOLATES

(1000 Third Avenue, 212-705-2347)

At Martine's you can watch chocolate chefs caramelize almonds and hand roll truffles. Be sure to try the filled chocolates in a mouth-watering assortment of flavors like caramel, Champagne, and cappuccino. Then create your own gift by filling up one of the company's signature hot pink boxes with your favorite selections (owner Martine Leventer, who started the store 14 years ago, believes that eating chocolate should be a sensual experience, hence her choice of packaging).

## RICHART

(7 East 55th Street, 212-371-9369)

The Richart family has been in the chocolate business since 1925, and flies its goods in directly from France (during extra-busy seasons, shipments arrive daily). The company is known for its complicated and elegant designs, including chocolates carefully adorned with hearts and mini cityscapes.



Richart. LEFT: Truffles from Vosges Haut-Chocolat.

## VOSGES HAUT-CHOCOLAT

(132 Spring Street, 212-625-2929)

This Soho boutique keeps things interesting for its eclectic clientele by featuring diverse ingredients like paprika, wasabi, and curry. Not crazy about the idea of Matcha green tea in your candy bar? Vosges also offers classic picks, including a collection appropriately called Comfort Foods.