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The Trend: Hot chocolate – with oysters?

By Rosa Jackson

Autumn visitors to Paris may feel that nothing beats a traditional *chocolat chaud*, but the city's chocolatiers have been experimenting on the old tea room favourite, with surprising results

The bartender raised his eyebrows as I placed my order: “Not many people ask for that.” I was perched at Jean-Paul Hévin's new chocolate bar, a modern gold-and-brown space where Parisians come to indulge in thoroughly adult versions of a traditional children's drink. From the long menu I had chosen hot chocolate with an oyster emulsion, a mysterious concoction whipped up in the *laboratoire* at the back.

When the plain white cup arrived, the soft-spoken waitress advised me not to stir the pearly blobs of what looked like sea foam into the hot chocolate, in order to appreciate the contrast. The first couple of sips went down easily, the iodised taste bringing a welcome saltiness to the intense chocolate. But then I encountered my first lump:



Preparation gets underway at Un Dimanche à Paris

either a piece of oyster or some jellied reconstitution. The bartender threw me a sympathetic glance as I pushed the cup aside.

Hévin might have gone one step too far with his oyster drink, but he is one of several Paris chocolate makers who are reviving the art of *chocolat chaud à l'ancienne*, hot chocolate so thick it pours like custard. If Italian hot chocolate relies on starch to obtain this texture, the French prefer a simple mixture of milk, chocolate and/or cocoa powder and sometimes cream. For Parisian chocolatiers, what counts most is the quality of the chocolate, which often comes from the celebrated Valrhona factory in the Rhône Valley.

Oyster is one of seven daring flavours on offer at Hévin's chocolate bar, which also serves three grand cru (pure origin) hot chocolates and a standard *chocolat chaud à l'ancienne* that relies on dark chocolate and a little cocoa powder. I also tried carrot, topped with a vivid orange froth that blended subtly into the chocolate, and banana-chilli pepper, its sweet purée tempered with a touch of spiciness.

The hot chocolate is served in a traditional white porcelain jug with four tiny cakes

With a similarly sleek décor drawing on brown tones, the recently opened “chocolate concept store” *Un Dimanche à Paris* seeks to soothe rather than challenge with its *chocolat chaud à l'ancienne*. Mine came in the traditional tall white porcelain jug complete with a wooden stick for keeping it smooth. Next to it, four doll-sized pastries were each a marvel of finesse. The recipe here



strays a little from the standard with the addition of cinnamon and vanilla and a dash of cream in the milk, making it the liquid equivalent of a cashmere scarf.

Not all hot chocolate must be overwhelmingly rich, as Yves and Alice Filleul prove at their little boutique Goût, Thé et Chocolat near the Place d'Aligre market. The recipe changes according to their whims, but recently they were serving *chocolat chaud* made

with water, cocoa powder and melted chocolate, and spiced with a little long pepper – a peppercorn with a warm, cinnamon-like scent. “You can drink this hot chocolate before lunch and it won’t ruin your appetite,” said Yves, and indeed he was right. With little space to sit, most customers drop by for a warming drink on their way through the boisterous market outside.

At his swish northern Marais tea room with a sparkling clean *laboratoire* upstairs, Jacques Genin uses the simplest possible recipe for hot chocolate so good that there is always a queue on weekends: 300g of Valrhona’s 72 per cent Araguani chocolate to one litre of full-cream milk. The resulting velvety drink was satisfyingly rich, yet not so sweet or creamy that it prevented me from sampling his *pâtisseries* or the small plate of ganaches and chocolate-dipped candied fruits that appeared on the table.

Open since February, Chloé
Chocolat goes a step further than

“Chocolat chaud” comprises
cinnamon, milk and dark chocolate,
vanilla, cream and milk

its rivals by using chocolate from a Bolivian co-operative. Chloé Doutre-Roussel made her name in London as the chocolate buyer for Fortnum & Mason before opening this boutique, which feels like an intimate Parisian salon. Alongside dark and milk chocolate bars, each with a tea to match, is the El Ceibo chocolate from Bolivia.



When I visited, the hot chocolate machine was still in its wrapping so I bought a box of the drinking chocolate to make at home. Following the recipe, I mixed milk, a little water, the grated 85 per cent chocolate and a sprinkling of sugar. This was the most complex and intriguing drink I tried, one that demanded my full attention.

For many Parisians and even more foreigners, the Holy Grail of hot chocolate is still the chocolat chaud à l'africain served at the Belle Epoque tea room Angelina. It's certainly hard to find this drink served with more ceremony: here, it comes with water to cleanse your palate, a bowl of whipped cream to complement its pudding-like richness, and a dense almond financier. The best in town? Probably not, but if you can't resist a brand name, it's still worth experiencing at least once.

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Details

Jean-Paul Hévin Chocolate Bar, 231 rue St-Honoré, 1st, +33 1 55 35 35 96, www.jphevin.com

Un Dimanche à Paris, 4-8 rue du Commerce St-André, 6th,
+33 1 56 81 18 18, www.un-dimanche-a-paris.com

Goût, Thé et Chocolat, 13 rue d'Aligre, 12th, +33 1 43 40 34 45,
www.gout-the-chocolat.com

Jacques Genin, 133 rue de Turenne, 3rd, +33 1 45 77 29 01

Chloé Chocolat, 26 rue Réaumur, 3rd, +33 1 44 61 13 52,
www.chloechocolat.com

Angelina, 226 rue de Rivoli, 1st, +33 1 42 60 82 00,
www.angelina-paris.fr

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