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Chocolate: The new beer-chaser

Getting hopped up on sugar and boozy-woozy

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If grey is the new black, and micro beers are the new wine, doesn't it stand to reason that chocolate is the new dinner? We can only hope. But as I recently learned at Spinnakers Gastro Brewpub in Victoria, we're already halfway there.

While the menu of small and large plates (everything from B.C. salmon cakes to Port Alberni pork tenderloin) looks appealing, I'm here for the chocolate and beer pairings, where \$15 gets you a fun afternoon at a stylish pub with five truffles prepared by Spinnakers' pastry chef, and a handful of tasters of their winning ales.

The Thymeless, a milk chocolate truffle hit with thyme and caramel, proves an excellent match with their Honey Pale Ale, a classic English soft brown ale with light hops. The Hopscotch, a dark chocolate with Chivas, topped with crumbled toffee bits, is even better, paired as it is with the complex, malty Scottish Ale.

By the end of the tasting, I'm hopped up on sugar and a little boozy-woozy. Not a bad feeling, really. Still, next time I'll try the beer float-- Nut Brown Ale vanilla and walnut-spice ice creams topped up with a seasonal Pumpkin Porter brew.

Ice cream beer floats-- the new breakfast?

Here's pastry chef Crystal Duck's Aphrodisiac truffle -- it pairs well with Mitchell's Extra Special Bitter.

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APHRODISIAC DARK CHOCOLATE WITH LAVENDER AND PEPPERCORN TRUFFLES - 7 oz (200 g) Guittard extra bittersweet 72% chocolate (a.k.a. Onyx) - 1 lb (500 g) tempered chocolate for dipping truffles - 1¼ cups (310 mL) whipping cream - 1 tsp (4 g) crushed peppercorns - a pinch or two dried lavender or fresh if you have it in the garden

Method:

1. Simmer cream, peppercorns and lavender in a pot over medium-high heat. Remove from heat and allow to steep for about 10 minutes.
2. Have ready a bowl with 7 oz Guittard extra bittersweet chocolate and a strainer lined with cheesecloth or a fine mesh strainer. Bring cream mixture to a simmer again. Strain over chocolate, pressing on solids with a wooden spoon until liquid is pressed through. Stir until smooth. Once cooled, chill in fridge until firm enough to scoop. Using hands, roll into smooth balls.
3. Have melted tempered chocolate standing by in a bowl. Tempering determines the final gloss and hardness of chocolate. Chocolate is tempered when its temperature is between 84 F and 88 F (29 C and 31 C). The easiest way to do this is to place chocolate in the microwave for 30-second intervals until chocolate is melted, being careful not to overheat it. The chocolate should only be slightly warmer than your bottom lip. An easy way to check for proper tempering is to apply a bit of chocolate to the point of a knife: If the chocolate has been correctly tempered, it will harden evenly and show a good gloss within five minutes.
4. You can either dip the truffles into the tempered chocolate with a fork or dip your fingers into the chocolate and roll the truffles by hand. Place them on a baking sheet that's lined with parchment paper. Store chocolates in the fridge. Remove them from the refrigerator 30 minutes before serving.