

LARDER

There's a world of hot chocolate to discover. Here's a tasty tour

by Lora Zarubin

Nothing soothes body and spirit on a chilly day like hot chocolate. Sipping it from a warm mug always evokes some of my favorite childhood memories. With a little effort, you can create a rich, soothing, even sensual treat. For truly great hot chocolate I always use whole milk (you're splurging and using high-quality chocolate, so leave the skim in the fridge). For the best consistency, I always let the mixture sit for a few minutes. My choices are so decadent, they're all you'll need for dessert.

For a serious chocolate fix, you can't beat **Frozen Hot Chocolate** from **Serendipity 3**, New York's landmark ice cream parlor. Now you can whip it up at home. \$3.95 for 6 oz. 800-672-9466.

Just thinking of the hot chocolate simmering at **La Maison du Chocolat** makes me miss Paris. Luckily, I can re-create their sumptuous concoction in my kitchen. The secret is to add a few pieces of chocolate to the cocoa. It's so rich, you'll need only a small cup. **Cocoa powder**, \$16 for 7.6 oz.; **Cuana Dark Chocolate**, \$10 for a 4.2-oz. bar. 877-740-5632.

If you're in a rush, just heat some chocolate milk from your local dairy. I use milk from **Ronnybrook Farm Dairy**, Ancramdale, NY. 800-772-6455. This small **Alessi saucepan** is perfect for making a single cup. \$145, Moss. 866-888-6677.

What's hot chocolate without **marshmallows**? Try fresh ones from E.A.T. in New York City (\$5 for 4 oz., 212-772-0022). I cut them in half so they soften quickly. Williams-Sonoma also sells yummy ones, \$19.50 for 8 oz. 800-541-2233.

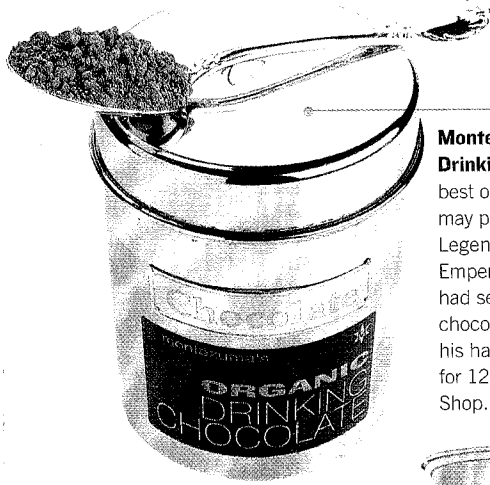
I had my first **Mexican hot chocolate** at Rick Bayle's home in Chicago. His rec calls for only milk and **Ibarra** chocolate (\$5.50 for 18.6 oz., Dean & DeLuca, 800-999-0306), but I'm sure there was some other magical ingredient—maybe a little love. Combine 2 1/2 cups of milk and 1 cup of chopped chocolate in a saucepan. Stir over medium heat until the chocolate has almost dissolved. Pour into a blender, cover loosely, and blend for 30 seconds.

This **ginger hot chocolate** wonderfully combines two of my favorite flavors. Add two slices of fresh ginger—2 inches long, 1/8 inch wide—for each cup of milk. Let steep over heat for 10 minutes. Remove the ginger and stir in your favorite hot chocolate. ▷



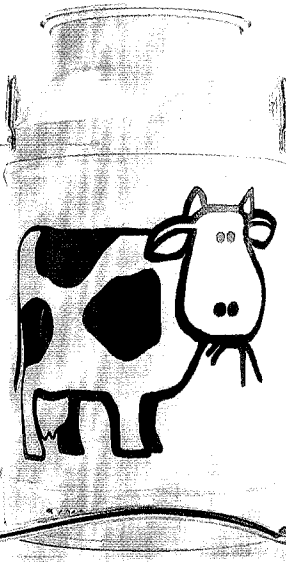
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More choices for the serious hot chocolate drinker

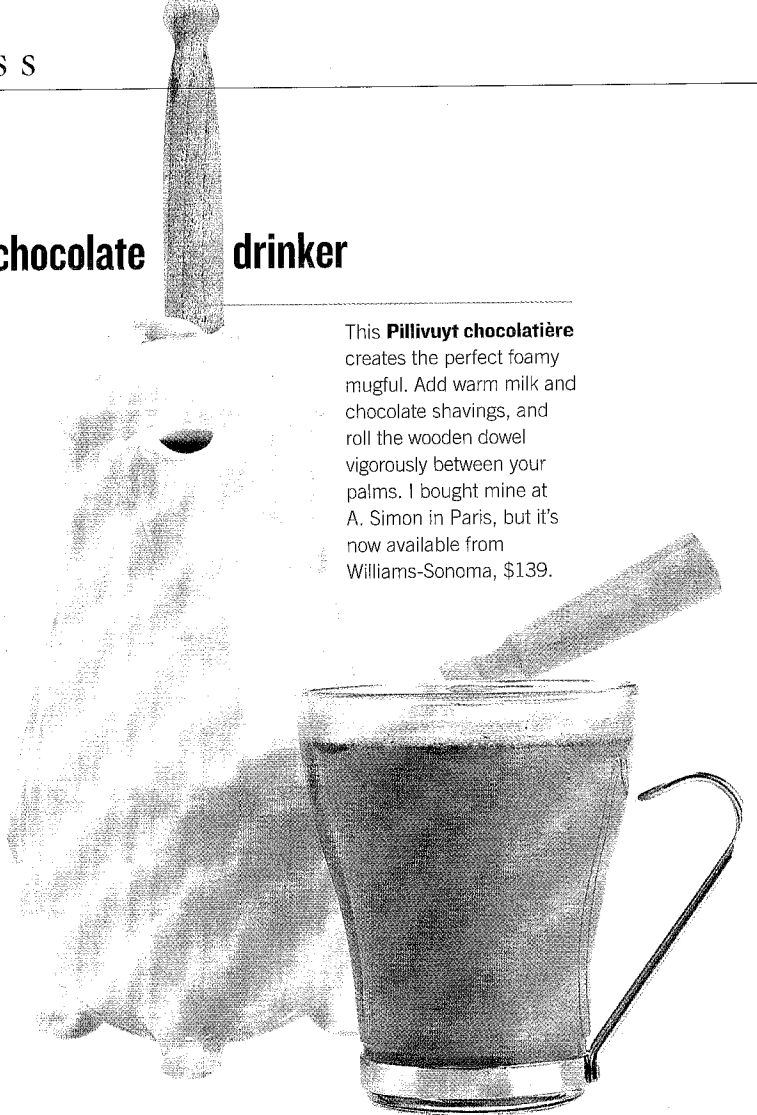


Montezuma's Organic Drinking Chocolate, the best organic choice, may pack an extra punch. Legend has it that Emperor Montezuma II had several cups of chocolate before visiting his harem. \$19.95 for 12.3 oz., The Pasta Shop. 888-952-4005.

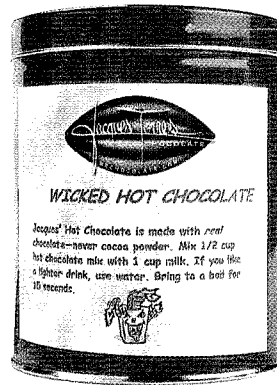
La Vache cocoa is for those who like hot chocolate on the sweeter side. And who can resist the packaging? I couldn't pass it up when I saw it at Rosslyn Deli in London. \$12.98 for 17.5 oz. 011-44-207-794-9210.



The Chocolate Society, a London organization and store dedicated to the history and appreciation of fine chocolate, offers one of the most decadent hot chocolates I've found. Their **Pure Flakes of Drinking Chocolate** is simply shaved Valrhona chocolate. It's like warm chocolate pudding in a cup. This is for the serious chocolate connoisseur. \$11.35 for 10.6 oz. chocolate.co.uk.



This **Pillivuyt chocolatière** creates the perfect foamy mugful. Add warm milk and chocolate shavings, and roll the wooden dowel vigorously between your palms. I bought mine at A. Simon in Paris, but it's now available from Williams-Sonoma, \$139.



Jacques Torres, former pastry chef at Le Cirque, just opened his own chocolate factory in Brooklyn. The snappy blend of spices and chillies in his **Wicked Hot Chocolate** warms you right up. \$14 for 1 lb., 3 oz. 718-875-9772.

Londoners line up outside the **Charbonnel et Walker** shop for hot cups of **Chocolat Charbonnel**. I always bring a tin home with me. Its mild, old-fashioned flavor is addictive. \$22.95 for 17.25 oz., The Cultured Cup. 888-847-8327.

