

FOOD+DRINK

EATING IS FUN

NEWS ETC.

CUPPA BURNING LOVE

There is a legend that Chinese Monks trained monkeys to harvest Ti Kuan Yin tea that grew high in the mountains in an area inaccessible to men. This oolong tea is known as Iron Goddess of Mercy. They can't guarantee that it is monkey-picked, but if it has to do with tea, Lurline and Allan Wagner can probably help you. **The Cuppa Tea Company** has been open less than two weeks, so the "Grand Opening" sign is still swinging from the front of the building. The Wagners are busy tweaking the menu and devising ways to market their teahouse. They have instituted traditional afternoon tea complete with tea sandwiches, part of an evolving menu dedicated to fresh seasonal selections. Also, you will find over 60 loose leaf teas for sale, including the famed Ti Kuan Yin, my personal favorite, as well as scones, muffins, tea pots, and other tea accoutrements. Corporate luncheon teas, bridal showers, and even a children's tea are all part of the plan. Visit their website at www.cuppa-tea.com for all the latest. They also plan an online store where you can order loose-leaf teas, books, and accessories. 1 N. Morris St. 254.8322.

COUNTY CUISINE

If you've ever wondered what Hanover tastes like, wonder no more. The Third Annual "A Taste of Hanover" happens Wednesday at the RTD Building, 8460 Times-Dispatch Blvd. in Mechanicsville. A \$30 ticket buys you unlimited food and drink (which goes to support two great causes). 6-9pm. 798.2400. www.hanoverarc.com



APHO/COURTESY OF GUITTARD CHOCOLATE COMPANY

Chocolate-maker Gary Guittard loves his cocoa, and his "cracker fanner" machine, used to shell cocoa beans.

There are also milk substitutes that could be used, too, and that could definitely affect the mouth-feel of a product.

In the cases where a person wouldn't really detect a difference, then what's the problem?

I think the problem is the over-engineering of foods. And why do we have to take a perfectly good food and begin to over-engineer it? It seems that some of our over-engineering in the past has not been necessarily good for the consumer or health-wise, especially with a lot of the good, positive information that's coming out in regards to the health aspects of chocolate.

So for you it's more of a thing about principles than an economic concern?

Yeah, exactly. And I think it's just the right thing to do in regards to the people that are involved in producing it in the countries that produce it... Why complicate a product that is beautifully simple and that people are just now wanting to understand percentages and why one chocolate from one country might taste different than chocolate from another country?

Is there a growing number of chocolate connoisseurs?

Yeah, there are a tremendous number of people that have realized the complexities of chocolate itself... and people are interested in the technical aspects, they're interested in the fact that a chocolate from Madagascar tastes differently than a chocolate from Ecuador. And I think people are surprised about that.

How so?

A Madagascar chocolate would have a very fruity, red fruit-type of flavor with a kind of tanginess, whereas Ecuador is kind of a flowery—Ecuador is a classical cocoa that is maybe a deeper chocolate flavor. Where the other one—the Madagascar—is more of a tiki, higher-pitched flavor.

Aren't we already inundated by chocolate that's not totally real—all the candy bars out there?

Well, we already have a name for this kind of chocolate -- it's called chocolate compound. Now, if somebody wants to come up with a name for this... It needs to have a separate designation. If somebody wants to call it a chocolate compound or an ultra-chocolate compound, that's fine. But tell people what the heck it is. —HILARY RHODES
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Chocolate Love

Gary Guittard wants his chocolate the way it's always been, but he's concerned about a new possible threat to a classic ingredient. If the Food and Drug Administration accepts a new proposal, chemically modified vegetable fats could replace cocoa butter in some chocolate. The Grocery Manufacturers Association (www.gmabrand.com) in joint association with many food groups including the Chocolate Manufacturers Association, have filed a petition with the FDA asking for allowances for modernizing food standards.

Their requests include "use of safe and suitable ingredients such as salt substitutes, sweeteners, and vegetable fats and oils where appropriate." One example given is the use of alternative vegetable fats to replace cacao fat -- used to make chocolate. They argue in the petition that such adjustments would make room for "needed flexibility."

But for fourth-generation chocolate maker Guittard, president and CEO of Guittard Chocolate Company (www.guittard.com) that would mean an unwelcome deviation from one of America's favorite indulgences.

"It's a major change to a pure food, especially with the revolution that's going on in foods now, with people very interested in and concerned about where foods come from, how they're grown

and the flavor."

I spoke to Guittard about his concerns, how chocolates taste different from one country to the next and what to call candy bars that aren't gourmet.

So bring this issue home to average, semi-regular chocolate eaters.

If you look at the butter section of a super market, and they have the butter in one area, then they have the spreads and then they have the margarine. This would in some ways be like putting them all together and asking the consumer to ferret out the real butter.

Would the average person be able to tell a difference in taste?

It depends on the fats that people are using.

FIND IT ONLINE: <http://dontmesswithourchocolate.guittard.com>

EAT THIS, RICHMOND

In dark and cozy corners of Richmond, renegade chefs are dishing up gastronomical greatness, sometimes offbeat but always tasty. Feed thy inner adventure eater.

Chef Rob's Jambalaya at Positive Vibe Café—With plenty o' shrimp, chicken, and heaping portions of andouille, Chef Rob Hamlin's jambalaya is kicked up just enough to make a rural Louisiana low-lying swamp boy proud. Best of all, Hamlin, formerly of DuJour Restaurant, ain't the only positively-vibed kitchen whiz. Enter local celebrity guest chefs—Bob DeCapri, who makes one heck of a Seafood Pot Pie, along with J. Frank, Jim Stevenson, and Ed Vasaio and it's easy to see why this joint pulls in the national headlines. Or maybe it's just the rip-roaring good time had by the belly dancers and café patrons on "Tummy Tuesdays." 2825 Hathaway Road—PS