

## Serious Eats

# Serious Beer Pairings: Chocolate and Beer for Valentine's Day

Posted by Maggie Hoffman, February 4, 2010



[Photographs: Maggie Hoffman]

Chocolate and beer? Together?

It may sound like a conspiracy on the part of beer-loving-guys to take back Valentine's Day, but take it from this former skeptic: Chocolate and beer can be incredible together.

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I'm not necessarily recommending eating chocolate with the kind of beer you drink with dinner. Many bitter brews are unlikely to taste great with sugary desserts. But this Valentine's Day, when you and your sweetheart sit down to savor a few chocolate truffles, consider pouring a fruity Belgian sour, a malty doppelbock, or maybe a potent barrel-aged imperial stout. You may be surprised how well these beverages complement filled chocolates, bringing out the best flavors in each. And isn't bringing out the best in each other what romance is all about?



## Malty Beers

When pairing chocolate and beer, rich malty flavors are your friend. German doppelbocks are meant to be hearty—monks brewed them to serve as a food replacement during the fasts of Lent and Advent. Doppelbocks are silky and warming, with nutty, molasses flavors. We particularly like [Ayinger's Celebrator](#), which has notes of caramel, cinnamon, and nutmeg. This beer brings out the ginger and cinnamon flavors in [Bespoke Chocolate's](#) Chai Spice truffle. The creaminess of the chocolate emphasizes the silky richness of the doppelbock, and the warm spice flavors in both make it fun to alternate bites and sips.

[Kiuchi Brewery's](#) Hitachino Nest Real Ginger Brew is another malty beer, with a twist: It has a burst of fresh ginger, which makes it a great match for ginger-filled chocolates. It is an amazing partner for [Bespoke's](#) Orange-Infused Dark Chocolate Truffle, which has crystallized ginger in the ganache filling. The fresh, potent flavors of the truffle are amazing with the toffee-like beer.

[Dogfish Head's](#) Theobroma

is an unusual beer brewed with cocoa powder and cocoa nibs, as well as honey and chilies. It may surprise you to pour it—the color is orangey amber and flavors are complex and delicate. This beer pairs well with white and milk chocolate. We loved it with [Zoe Chocolate's](#) Aegean Pistachio truffle.

This nut-coated chocolate is filled with ground pistachio and and vanilla-scented white chocolate ganache; it's light and fragrant and lovely with the Theobroma. This beer also paired well with the creamy key lime ganache in [Jacques Torres'](#) "Lovebug" white chocolate bonbon.

As the beer warms, rustic yeasty flavors and caramel malt come out to play, making it a good match for the gooey cayenne caramels from [Lillie Belle Farms](#).

Belgian dubbels are also good for pairing with chocolate since they have rich malty flavors as well as some dark winelike fruit notes. We liked the Maredsous 8 with slightly tangy, fruity chocolates like the Strawberry Balsamic truffle from [Bespoke](#).

## Fruity and Sour Beers

Looking for a bit of zing this Valentine's Day? Traditional lambics are brewed with whole fruit, producing a funky, barnyardy beer with intense (and quite sour) fruit flavor. If possible, try to avoid lambics that are made by adding fruit syrup instead—these will taste more like fruit soda than like a sophisticated adult beverage.

We love [Cascade Brewing's](#) award-winning Apricot Ale,

which ferments for 16 months before being aged in French oak wine barrels. Ripe apricots give this beer a sweet and sour fruit flavor that makes an amazing match for the passion fruit-filled white chocolate heart from Bespoke. If you think you're not a fan of white chocolate, these hearts might change your mind—they're made from non-deodorized chocolate with a fresh, tangy filling.

The earthy, yeasty flavors of the Apricot Ale elevate the chocolate to a higher level of complexity. We were wowed. (We are also wild for Cascade's Kriek, but that might be better to pair with cheesecake than chocolate.)

[Ococoa Chocolates](#), based in Los Angeles, makes a line of gourmet nut-butter cups that are pretty delicious on their own, and even nicer paired with beer. The macadamia-guava cup is filled with an usual combination of tangy guava jam and creamy macadamia which matches perfectly with Cherish Raspberry Lambic from [Van Steenberg Brewery](#) in Belgium. The beer is a little sweeter than we'd usually drink, but has tart flavors to balance the jammy ones, and a good malty, yeasty backbone. It's surprisingly drinkable and delicious with the guava-filled chocolate.

Some foods align perfectly with beers that share their flavors, while other pairings work through contrast. When we first tasted Bespoke's honeyed peanut butter truffle, we knew it would work with a fruity beer for a play on PB&J. [Rodenbach Classic](#), a Flemish red ale, has zingy fruit flavors reminiscent of cherries and raspberries. Hay and butter notes make it a fabulous match for peanut-butter filled chocolates. They're fun together. We also adored this beer with Bespoke's famous Pretzel-Covered Sea Salt Caramel—the tart beer was a great foil for the rich creamy caramel, making the flavor of each one pop.

## Dark and Chocolaty Beers

[Maui Brewing Company's](#) Coconut Porter is already a drinkable dessert, but it's even better paired with the Jacques Torres' fresh coconut bonbon. If your loved



one loves Mounds bars, he or she will adore these dark chocolates filled with coconut and white chocolate ganache. The beer is silky and rich, with deep chocolate flavors and just a hint of milky coconut—it's a heavenly match. We also love this porter with anything almond-flavored—Ococoa's Marzipan Truffle brings out the richness in the beer, making for a truly decadent dessert.

The Imperial Choklat Stout from [Southern Tier Brewing Company](#) smells like a banana split and tastes like a chocolate malted milkshake. It's a sure thing with Valentine's Day chocolates: try it with Zoe Chocolate's mint truffle. The creamy, fresh mint is delicious with the sweet, chocolaty beer. This beer is also sweet enough to complement Zoe's spun-honey chocolate. The rich cashew butter in Ococoa's cashew apricot cup compliments the creamy vanilla flavors in the beer; it's a delicious match.

Milk stouts are brewed with lactose sugar, which adds a bit of sweetness and body to the beer. The Milk Stout from [Left Hand Brewing](#)

has dry, rich, dark chocolate flavors and a velvety mouthfeel. It's good with coffee-filled chocolates such as Zoe Chocolate's Caffè

truffle. The creamy coffee ganache resonates with the richness of the stout, and the bitterness of the coffee is right at home. This beer also works wonders with intense dark chocolates such as the 80% cocoa bonbon from Jacques Torres.

[Young's Double Chocolate Stout](#)

is a smooth dark beer with quite a bit of roasty flavor. It's delicious with spiced chocolates such as Bespoke's cardamom-infused Turkish Coffee truffle. [River Horse](#) Brewers Reserve Oatmeal Milk Stout, a not-very-sweet stout, has the perfect smoky, nutty flavors to pair with a nut-encrusted blue cheese ganache truffle from [Lillie Belle Farms](#) in Oregon. It would also probably work well with other nutty chocolates, though it was perfect with the savory blue cheese filling. We also liked this roasty beer with Lillie Belle's slightly spicy chocolate-covered Red Velvet Almonds, and aren't almonds an aphrodisiac?

The Ten Fidy from [Oskar Blues](#)

may appear harmless—it comes in a can—but this imperial stout should be taken seriously. Intense and velvety, it complements the milky, nutty flavors in Jacques Torres' Almondine bonbon. Ground candied almonds suspended in ganache contrast the dark chocolate shell and the strong and roasty beer.

The most intense pairing we tried was the combination of Bespoke's Single-Estate Columbian Dark Chocolate Truffle (swoon) with [Goose Island's](#) barrel-aged Bourbon County Stout. The intense dark chocolate is the only thing that can stand up to this potent, velvety beer, and we were head-over-heels for the pairing. Smoky chocolate and vanilla notes in the beer amplify the deep flavors of the 70% cocoa chocolate ganache—together, they make one of the sexiest desserts we've ever tasted.

## Find the Chocolates

[Bespoke Chocolates](#): 212-260-7103

[Jacques Torres](#): 718-875-9772

[Oocoa Chocolates](#): 800-897-7015

[Lillie Belle Farms](#): 888-899-2022

[Zoe's Chocolates](#): 717-387-5882

Disclosure: All of the chocolates were provided by the chocolatiers. The Theobroma, Cascade Apricot and Kriek, Coconut Porter, Imperial Choklat Stout, Ten Fidy and Bourbon County Stout were review samples.

About the author: Maggie Hoffman and her team of tasters are always looking for their new favorite beers. Maggie also writes about cooking for [Pithy and Cleaver](#).

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