



FROM SWEET TO HEAT

Whether you prefer it in an artisan bar or (gasp!) on a burrito, chocolate is never a bad idea.

BY CAROLE DIXON

Former Southern California coffee sales manager Haris Car had a life-changing moment in Peru. “People there were so happy and fulfilled with less,” he says. He also stumbled upon a small artisanal chocolate factory, and that’s when he started plotting, experimenting, and designing packaging for his new Pasadena chocolate shop, **Car Artisan Chocolate** on Colorado Blvd., where he specializes in bean-to-bar confections (carartisanchocolate.com).

The shop has an atmosphere of a corner coffee shop where you want to hang out all day on your laptop with a cup of drinking chocolate (the original way chocolate was served), while the chocolate bars are created on site in the open-air kitchen. The process of roasting coffee beans and cacao is similar. “You use the same drum roaster for both,” says Car, “but you crush cocoa nibs that turn into chocolate.”

Car sources high-quality cacao beans from remote regions around the world where farmers take care of their workers and pay higher wages. Unlike most commercial bars, Car’s are not mostly milk and sugar, and he uses beans that aren’t bitter. “You are creating a profile and need to develop fruit sugars in the

roast, so the chocolate is not too acidic or has a bitter aftertaste,” he says.

The best-selling bars are lavender (with 60% dark milk,) Tanzania, Mexico, Peru, and Nicaragua. And, since cacao beans are technically a fruit, and there are reported health benefits from antioxidants when a high percentage (about 70%) is used in single-origin dark chocolate, you don’t need to feel too guilty—plus, the bars make perfect Valentine’s gifts.

If you want to take a deeper dive into the world of chocolate, take a class from chocolate expert Ruth Kennison of **The Chocolate Project** (who consulted on Car’s shop) and allow her to lead you through a private or group tasting with unique and exotic finds from Brazil to Vietnam (chocolate-project.com).

For a more traditional box of chocolates, **Mignon**, in Pasadena and Glendale, carries a best-selling dark chocolate shell filled with dark chocolate ganache as well as ginger with lime sea salt and chili pepper chocolate confections (mignon-chocolate.com). For something exotic, at **Royce Chocolate** in Arcadia you can find white-chocolate-dipped potato chips infused with fromage blanc cheese that pair well with a bottle of Merlot (roycechocolate.com). **📍**



MOLE MASTERS

Mole, a beloved confection and a key ingredient in some centuries-old Mexican dishes, uses chocolate as the base of the sauce.

Mijares is the oldest Mexican restaurant in Pasadena, going back 101 years. The eponymous family carries on their grandmother’s traditional poblano mole recipe that uses two kinds of chiles, Mexican chocolate, nuts, and bananas—and takes a whole day to prepare. Currently, chef Antonio Campos, who has worked there an impressive 35 years, infuses a bit of his Zacatecas, Mexico, hometown spin on the dish served over shredded chicken breast. It’s a perfectly balanced rendition that will leave you craving a return visit to the ample patio dining area. Just be warned: It’s not on the menu and only made on special occasions or by request in advance (mijaresrestaurant.com).

Other standout mole includes Oaxacan restaurant **Guelaguetza** in Koreatown, famous for its family recipe using over 25 ingredients (ilovemole.com). **Moles la Tía** in East L.A. features 16 types of mole, including mango, tamarind, hibiscus flower, and pistachio. **La Casita Mexicana** in Bell serves entomatadas, similar to enchiladas, smothered in mole, cotija cheese, and red onions (casitamex.com). At **CaCao Mexicatessen** in Eagle Rock, you can add mole poblano to chicken street tacos or chicken burrito (cacaodeli.com). There is even a mole cheeseburger and mole fries, and a Mission fig mole over a chicken thigh.



Guelaguetza
Mole Tamales

TOP: AMIRALI MIRHACHEMIAN/UNSPASH; BELOW: GOLDBELLY.COM

THE PARTY ISN'T OVER

From nonalcoholic tipples to tea, avoiding alcohol doesn't need to feel like a New Year's resolution deprivation with these three fantastic spots. Here's where to celebrate dry January. **BY CAROLE DIXON**

Maybe it's a backlash to pandemic binge drinking, but avoiding alcohol is *de rigueur* as we ring in 2022. Experiential designer and art major Jillian Barkley, owner of **Soft Spirits** in Echo Park, decided to take it a step further and open the first nonalcoholic bottle shop in L.A. (*softspirits.club*). "I stopped drinking about three years ago and had a personal vested interest," she says. "I decided if it's something that doesn't exist maybe I could create it."

Soft Spirits carries about 40 brands—many are local, and you can even sit down at a cozy bar and discuss them with Barkley. "I was really impressed with the options," she says. One of them is the striking cut-glass decanters holding local brand **Optimist Botanicals** (*optimistdrinks.com*). "It's full of flavor and has an interesting expression. It's in its own category and a completely new way to think about drinking."

"This isn't a temporary thing, it's



the beginning of a meaningful cultural shift to more mindful consumption," says Lisa Farr Johnstone, co-founder of Optimist Botanicals. "This is also a nod to the trending consumption method known as 'zebra striping.' It's becoming acceptable not to drink, or to have that first gin then switch to something that won't ruin your chances of getting up early to work out."

Three Spirits is a plant-based alternative that gives you the buzz without the

booze (*threespiritdrinks.com*). "It comes in three functional beverages with properties that are mood enhancing, from soothing to stimulating, while not becoming intoxicated and with no side effects," says Barkley. Look for Saturday sidewalk samplings at Soft Spirits if you're interested in trying out a few brands.

If you'd like a bit more zing, **Brighter Tonic** is a new sparkling beverage by Pasadena native Elizabeth Varnell that combines apple cider vinegar with lemon-lime, blood orange, and lemon-ginger and is available at Erewhon, Whole Foods, and Bristol Farms (*brightertonic.com*).

As the name suggests, **Genever** in Historic Filipinotown focuses on gin-based, vintage-style libations in a special occasion speakeasy atmosphere (*geneverla.com*). But the company, owned by three Filipino American women, makes many zero-proof versions of its complex cocktails that harken back to Prohibition. The fall-winter menu features the Happy Happy, Joy Joy, where Ming River gin is swapped out for Amass Riverine alcohol-free spirit and finished with passion fruit, National Bitters, and citrus. The Earth Crosser uses cold-brew coffee rather than tequila or Galliano, and is topped with coconut cream, egg, and mole bitters.

For an interesting pit stop to savor a cup of caffeine that looks more like a MOCA exhibit, **Steep** in Chinatown features Japanese tea—from green oolong to Old Tree black—that you can order by the artisan ceramic pot for up to four people. Add pastries or Soymilk Cold Noodles and make it an afternoon meal.

Art of Tea, which can be found at The Huntington, is debuting a Matcha Cocoa in January 2022 that you can sip while you stroll through the grounds. ☐



Fanny's at the Academy Museum

MUSEUM DINING HAS ARRIVED

World-renowned chefs are opening new spots in world-class museums and cultural institutions across town. **BY CAROLE DIXON**

It's a wonderful L.A. pursuit to view art from Rembrandt to Rauschenberg and even Dorothy's iconic ruby red slippers, but you might need a Michelin-level meal after all that culture and contemplation.

The Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens in San Marino was ahead of the curve, currently undergoing a \$7.5 million renovation that will expand the historic **Rose Garden Tea Room** (*huntington.org*). Set to be completed in 2022, it will include a new pavilion and outdoor patio amid the Shakespeare Garden. The institution also recently hosted a pop-up with acclaimed chef David Chang and American Express Platinum on the mansion grounds to keep patrons satiated.

In the Miracle Mile, the Drago Bros. have been serving their Italian family recipes at the Petersen Automotive Museum for the past five years and Ray's and Stark Bar (operated by Patina Restaurant Group) remains across the street at LACMA, but the Academy Museum next door has opened **Fanny's** with chef Raphael Francois (Tesse in West Hollywood and Le Cirque in New York) at the helm (*academymuseum.org*).

The partnership was slowly hatched with restaurateur Bill Chait (who opened Otium adjacent to The Broad) and Carl Schuster (former Wolfgang Puck catering president) after joining forces for Eli Broad's 80th birthday at Sony Studios in 2013.

For this dream team, it was important to build a Hollywood restaurant that evokes a feeling of a special occasion, as though you've stepped into another era. Think the Brown

Derby, Chasen's, and The Bistro Garden. "The big reveal when you walked in was a large part of what made those restaurants so amazing," says Chait. Translating that to the modern world meant that it had to be chef driven as well. Chef Francois had worked at Michelin-star restaurants but was interested in crafting more approachable food. "He had the stature but also the flexibility and breadth of menu," Chait says.

The layered rollout menu will include seafood from a woodburning grill, côte de boeuf, tableside-prepared Dover sole, and flambe crêpe suzette. A partnership with Wolfgang Puck Catering will serve larger-scale museum events.

Cocktails by Julian Cox also have retro representation and are named after film characters, and art by cartoonist Konstantin Kakanias gracing the Commune-designed interiors.

In the former Patina space occupied by acclaimed chef Joachim Splichal, chef Ray Garcia has taken over the kitchen at Walt Disney Concert Hall with operating partner Levy.

Over at UCLA's Hammer Museum in Westwood, iconic food activist Alice Waters has opened her first L.A. restaurant, **Lulu**, along with chef and writer David Tanis (Chez Panisse in Berkeley) and Hammer Director Ann Philbin (*hammer.ucla.edu*). The courtyard eatery advocates for school-supported agriculture; former First Lady Michelle Obama has already been a guest for the rotating three-course prix fixe menu. You can also view an iconic Jorge Pardo mosaic wall while eating off plates and bowls made by ceramicist Shoshi Watanabe. ☐



Fanny's Hamachi Crudo



Flamingo Resort

BEYOND PASADENA

These quick-hop destinations combine food and fitness for a fun-filled romantic weekend.

BY CAROLE DIXON

Close to Home

Driving through the front gates of **The Langham Huntington** (*langhamhotels.com*) already feels like an occasion, but you are only 10 minutes from the bustle of Old Pasadena shopping. Whether you plan to visit for a weekend or just a day, the Chuan Spa is a great place to reboot. For well-being and relaxation, book the Chuan Balancing massage or the

Chuan Harmony, designed to stimulate meridian harmony with acupressure and various relaxation massage techniques, inducing a deep sense of calm.

> PRO TIP: Add hot stones, CBD oil, or aromatherapy for an enhanced experience.

Since early 2020, the hotel has had a major refresh. All public corridors on the main level were replaced with

white marble imported from Portugal and Spain to enhance the classic beauty of the property. Renovations also took place in all the dining outlets from the Lobby Lounge to The Royce Wood-Fired Steakhouse and the Tap Room. Stop for lunch at The Hideaway and order the Winter Market Greens Salad, a gluten-free, vegan, and dairy-free option. The Terrace is open for breakfast and dinner with good vegan/vegetarian options, from a Greek Yogurt Bowl to Vegan Meatloaf with garlic jasmine rice and root vegetables.

If you decide to make a night or weekend of it, suite options for couples include the Huntington Suite for the views, Ford Cottage for a more private getaway, or, for a true splurge, the Tournament of Roses Suite, which offers vistas of the San Gabriel Mountains on one side and the Horseshoe Garden and San Marino on the other.

Malibu Mountain Retreat

Tucked away in the mountains of Malibu Canyon, **Calamigos Ranch and Beach Club** (*calamigos.com*) is somewhat of a local secret. Known for wedding receptions on the grounds, it also houses a rustic-chic hotel, spa, and multiple restaurants. The better-known Malibu Café is where you'll find one of the best



Calamigos Ranch and Beach Club

black Tuscan kale Caesar salads in California. For something a little fancier, head to The Ranch Club for the wild-caught Barramundi with baby root veggies and tomato broth.

> PRO TIP: For a romantic retreat, book one of the double bungalows, with a deep soaking tub on a patio that is surrounded by nature. You're also near a hiking trail on the grounds if you want to venture out.

During the day you can also enjoy yoga on the lawn or visit the spa for a treatment—including a massage among the Malibu vineyards. The property can also whisk guests down to its Beach Club for sunbathing or paddleboarding, and be sure to check out the grab-and-go menu of snacks, sandwiches, and salads for a picnic by the shore.

Vegas, Baby, Vegas

Las Vegas might not be the first place that comes to mind for a wellness escape, but **Resorts World Las Vegas** (*rwlasvegas.com*) has a spa that is a wellness haven, with rituals from around the globe.

Awana Spa offers the first and only Art of Aufguss treatment in the U.S. This experience features a theater-inspired heated room with aromatherapy, choreographed music, lighting, and even dancing towels. It might sound bizarre, but this avant-garde, social experience is meant to relax, invigorate, and inspire playfulness as each sauna meister curates a 30-minute themed program.

If six vitality pools are more your speed, try the Fountain of Youth, which also houses a heated crystal laconium room, tepidarium chairs, and the experiential Rain Walk. LED screens transport guests to various picturesque destinations. You can book a "passport" for a two-hour exploration.

> PRO TIP: If traveling with a group, look into the Foot Spa Lounge, which can be reserved for up to 20 people. The therapies concentrate on specific ailments, such as jet lag, sleep health, and muscle recovery.

The property has some of the most

beloved dining concepts from L.A., including Wally's, Craig's vegan ice cream, Mulberry Street Pizza, and chef Ray Garcia's ¡Viva!—and you can shop at Fred Segal to boot.

The hotel recently added plane-charter services as part of its new Boeing 787-8 private transportation fleet, opening up new opportunities for large groups to travel together nonstop to Sin City. Options include a Bombardier Express XRS jet designed to comfortably accommodate 12 guests.

suites spread out over 10 acres. There is also a 20,000-square-foot, full-service health club, spa, and fitness center. Private poolside cabanas and tennis and pickleball courts are just a few of the outdoor offerings. Book outdoor yoga classes with sound baths for your next special occasion.

> PRO TIP: Sunday through Thursday, 4–6 p.m., is Golden Hour, with delicious Mediterranean bites and drink specials from the signature Lazeway Club.

When it's time to venture out, plan a



The Langham Huntington: The Royce Wood-Fired Steakhouse



The Langham Huntington: Chuan Spa VIP Suite



Resorts World Las Vegas: Awana Spa

Drink Wine in Santa Rosa

Speaking of easy flights, you can go direct from Burbank airport and, in less than an hour, land in the northern Bay Area at the quaint Charles Schultz Airport in Santa Rosa. From there, it's a short, 13-mile drive to the newly refurbished, mid-century **Flamingo Resort** (*flamingoresort.com*).

Located close to downtown, the hotel has been a cornerstone of the community for 60 years and features 170 rooms and 14 spacious poolside

visit to The Barlow outdoor artisan marketplace in Sebastopol. This is a great option if you don't feel like traipsing to a bunch of different wineries. Region, a one-stop tasting room, showcases the best wines from 14 appellations—by the taste, glass, or bottle with more than 50 options. Opt for a full-service tasting experience from winemakers or the self-serve wine station. Or head to newly opened Abbot's Passage Winery and Mercantile in Glen Ellen for shopping and lunch amid the vines. 🍷