

## Fine Living: Premium Chocolates

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*Premium chocolates from around the world*

The world of chocolate has its highs and lows, to be sure. And the solid milk-chocolate bunnies we all enjoyed as kids are fine for 7-year-olds, but your palate has evolved beyond swapping quality for quantity. While Ferrero Rocher and Godiva are fine for some, the true chocolate connoisseur knows that the best there is to offer cannot be found in any drugstore.

Thankfully, gourmet chocolate is more abundant -- and more available -- in today's market than ever before. After all, if Americans spend about \$13 billion a year on chocolate, why shouldn't we spend it on the good stuff?

### La Maison du Chocolat

**Country of origin:** France

**Price:** Truffles are around \$80 per pound and boxes are as much as \$200.

As one of [France](#)'s finest manufacturers, there may be no other store that makes chocolate as luxurious as La Maison du Chocolat. The name says it all; it translates to The House of Chocolate.

La Maison packages its chocolates in leather boxes that are fine enough for the best [jewelry](#). Each sweet contains no more than 65% cocoa, which provides the best balance between sweet and bitter. The shop proudly offers the finest in dark- and milk-chocolate truffles, marrons glacés, caramels and mendiants (chocolate slices that are sprinkled with dried fruits, assorted nuts or orange peel).

**Perfect chocolate pairing:** La Maison founder Robert Linxe recommends a glass of fine water as the best pairing for his chocolate. On that recommendation, we suggest you consider an ultra-pure mineral water that will not mask any of the nuances of the sweet.

If you must serve it with [alcohol](#), La Maison suggests a fortified wine such as Riversaltes, Maury, Banyuls, or Rasteau.

### Dagoba Organic Chocolate

**Country of origin:** U.S.

**Price:** Approximately \$40 per pound.

Dagoba Organic Chocolate -- the name means Temple of the Gods in Sanskrit -- was founded by Frederick Schilling, a former chef who wanted to make top-quality organic chocolates.

The Dagoba company buys only handpicked, [organic](#) beans and cocoa from cooperatives in the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Ecuador, and Madagascar. The company's desire to comply with certified fair trade practices is, in large part, responsible for the premium price.

Dagoba's selection of chocolate bars includes hazelnut, milk chocolate, roseberry (a blend of raspberry and rose hips), mint/rosemary, lime and macadamia nut, chai (milk chocolate mixed with cardamom, anise, black pepper, cinnamon, and clover) and lavender/blueberry. The company also offers blended chocolates, single-origin chocolates, infusions, and drinking and baking chocolates.

For its efforts, Dagoba's products were named Best Organic Bars in 2001 by *Food & Wine*, the World's Best Chocolate by CNNMoney.com, and Best Dark Chocolate by the *San Francisco Chronicle*.

**Perfect chocolate pairing:** These gems pair well with light, nutty Costa Rican or Dominican coffees -- fair-trade brews, of course.

## Chocolatier Neuhaus

**Country of origin:** Belgium

**Price:** Prices range from \$70 to \$150 per pound.

Founded by Jean Neuhaus in 1857, the Confiserie et Chocolaterie Neuhaus-Perrin is reputed to be the birthplace of the praline, a bite-sized treat that's filled chocolate. Since its creation, the praline has become a staple of all manufacturers.

The best traditions are still very much a part of everything Neuhaus does. The company offers all kinds of milk and dark chocolates (80 varieties), filled with ganache, caramel, nuts, coffees, and liqueurs -- all of them made with only the best ingredients.

**Perfect chocolate pairing:** Neuhaus' fruit pralines pair beautifully with strawberries and balsamic vinegar, while the more traditional bits go well with full-bodied red wines.

We expect Switzerland to be on this list, but Japan?

## Charbonnel et Walker

**Country of origin:** United Kingdom

**Price:** Truffles go for about \$80 per pound, while an assortment will grab \$70 per pound.

Charbonnel et Walker was founded in 1875 and is one of the earliest producers of chocolates in Britain. In the early days, the company was located in a small factory in southern England, where craftsmen made each chocolate by hand for delivery and sale in downtown London.

The production process is more refined these days, but the quality has remained intact. Charbonnel et Walker prides itself on using the best plain chocolate with the finest dark couverture to produce the silkiest, smoothest texture imaginable.

The company's range includes its famous Ginger Sticks, Rose & Violet Creams, special assortments, and luxury truffles, such as Champagne, Port & Cranberry, Cappuccino, and Pink Champagne (strawberry and champagne).

**Perfect chocolate pairing:** [Champagne](#) truffles pair best with -- what else -- a bottle of Dom Perignon or other quality bubbly. Similarly, Charbonnel et Walker's [Port](#) truffles match well with a tawny or other light port.

## Noka Chocolate

**Country of origin:** Japan

**Price:** Prices range from \$60 to \$100 per pound.

Noka Chocolate's chocolatier Katrina Merrem says that her life's passion is to return chocolate to its purest, most luxurious state. She wants to craft the finest single-estate dark-chocolate truffles and chocolates in the world.

The result is Noka's Vintages Collection, which is a compilation of the best single-estate chocolates from the world's best regions (Venezuela, Ecuador, Trinidad, and Côte d'Ivoire). This, however, is not to undersell Noka's mixed collection -- an assortment of the company's

best dark chocolates and truffles.

**Perfect chocolate pairing:** Noka compares tasting chocolate to [tasting wine](#) and recommends bold red wines and brut champagnes as the ideal complements.

## DeLafée chocolates

**Country of origin:** Switzerland

**Price:** Prices range from \$100 to \$200 per pound.

If it's luxury chocolates you're after, look no further than DeLafée, whose signature chocolates are dusted with edible 24-karat gold. The result is a beautiful and highly symbolic luxury product that's truly unforgettable.

Founded in 2004, DeLafée is among the world's best producers of chocolate. Its products are made from a blend of Criollo cocoa beans (from Ecuador and Venezuela) and Forastero cocoa beans (from Ghana) to produce a rounded, satisfying and sensual experience.

Taste the gold pralines, which are made of a shell of 56% cocoa and filled with a creamy chocolate ganache, or try DeLafée's signature gold lollipop -- a heart-shaped, strawberry-flavored chocolate offering that's dusted with the company's signature edible gold.

**Perfect chocolate pairing:** Since gold is the metal of celebration, edible gold must naturally be paired with your best bottle of champagne.

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## chocolate euphoria

Here are a few tasting tips to round out the chocolate experience. First, cut your chocolate in half to serve it. Don't gobble it down in one fell swoop; let the chocolate melt on your tongue for a few moments to enjoy its texture and flavor. Next, chew each bite three to five times, enough to blend the filling and coating. Finally, push the chocolate against your palate and notice how well and how long the flavor lingers on the tongue. Enjoy!

Resources:

<http://money.cnn.com>

[www.lamaisonduchocolat.com](http://www.lamaisonduchocolat.com)

[www.dagobachocolate.com](http://www.dagobachocolate.com)

[www.neuhaus.be](http://www.neuhaus.be)

[www.charbonnel.co.uk](http://www.charbonnel.co.uk)

[www.nokachocolate.com](http://www.nokachocolate.com)

[www.delafee.com](http://www.delafee.com)

[www.richart-chocolates.com](http://www.richart-chocolates.com)

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