

BALANCING ACT

*FINE WINES AND
CHOCOLATES TEAM UP
TO CREATE SYMMETRY
ON YOUR PALATE*

By Suzy Feine | Photography Dolce Studios

Pairing a fine wine with a fine piece of chocolate is a lesson in balance: The sweetness, fruitiness and acidity must all work in harmony, along with your own flavor preferences. And this balance is only found when you select the finest of ingredients, follow a few simple steps, and slowly and methodically savor every moment of the pairing process.

Begin with the finest chocolates served at room temperature, recommends Mary Leonard, CEO and chocolatier at Chocolat Celeste in St. Paul. "Let the chocolate melt in your mouth to prepare your palate for the wine," she says.

Next, take a sip of wine and let it coat your palate, notes Kristen Kowalski, co-owner of The Wine Market in Mendota Heights and Woodbury. She is one of only six women in Minnesota accredited by the International Sommelier Guild. "Then take another sip, and really think about what it's doing; think about the sweetness in your mouth and savor it," she says.

Finally, relax. "Americans digest things quickly and they miss the experience," says Bob Kowalski, co-owner of The Wine Market. "With wines and chocolates, there are a lot of things happening on your palate and we tend to miss the entire experience." So sit back and savor every morsel and every moment of these four perfect pairings.



ON THE BACK PORCH

Think a warm summer's day, a relaxing chaise lounge and lively conversation when you prepare for this pairing. Chocolat Celeste's signature truffle, **Celestial Sweetie**, is crafted from pure bittersweet chocolate ganache, Frangelico liquor, fresh whipping cream and butter to create a bite of heaven. Such a sweet and pure confection needs an equally sweet wine, which is why this truffle finds perfect union with **Malvira' Birbet**.

Served chilled, this slightly effervescent wine carries a fragrant mix of roses, strawberries and raspberries. Blended with the flavors of toasted hazelnuts, cocoa and vanilla berries found in the Frangelico, this refreshing combination of flavor profiles is idyllic. "It's a smooth combination with a nice synergy," says Bob. "There is nothing competing; the sweetness of the chocolate and the sweetness of the wine are well matched."

Wine selection: Malvira' Birbet, Italy, 5.5% alcohol, \$21.99

SWEET SOPHISTICATION

New on the fine chocolate scene is Chocolat Celeste's **Edible Pearl**, a white chocolate and vanilla bourbon bon-bon surrounding small pearls of dark chocolate hidden inside. Each square bon-bon is hand-stenciled with tinted cacao butter, creating a swag of sophistication that could be considered too beautiful to consume, until you taste it paired with **Jackson-Triggs Icewine**.



Grapes frozen on the vine and picked late give this ice wine its subtly sweet tone with hints of peaches, apricots and mangoes. The white chocolate and vanilla bourbon in the bon-bon accentuate the fruity flavors of the ice wine, bringing pure pleasure to your palate. "The clean, richness of the bon-bon's traditional fine chocolate taste goes well this wine," says Leonard.

Wine selection: Jackson-Triggs Icewine, Niagara Peninsula, Canada, 10.5% alcohol, \$19.99

BY THE FIRE

Snuggle up by a roaring fire with someone special and indulge in Chocolat Celeste's **Grand Marnier** truffle matched with **W & J Graham's 10-year Tawny Porto**. The bittersweet chocolate ganache and juicy orange flavors of the truffle harmonize with the fruit and orange peel scent of the Port. "This barrel-aged Port is made with classic Port grape varieties that have been oxidized, giving it that nutty, caramel, oak-aged quality," says Kristen. "This wine is meant to be drunk on its own with a few nuts or a nice piece of chocolate."

Wine selection: W & J Graham's 10-year Tawny Porto, Portugal, 20% alcohol, \$38.99

SPICE IT UP

For those searching for a twist on the ordinary, Chocolat Celeste's **Hot Chili Pepper** truffle, made with smooth dark chocolate, chili pepper spice and a touch of salt, is one not to be overlooked. "It surprises you because of where it hits your palate," says Leonard. "I add a touch of salt so it also has a different burn on your palate; a little bit slower."

Because of the slight salt content, this truffle pairs beautifully with **DASHE Late Harvest Zinfandel**. Made from classic California Zinfandel grapes, this wine features a fruity flavor profile that perfectly balances the salt and spice of the truffle. "Zinfandel is so great with salty foods because salt dries out your palate and the fruit and the sweetness temper the salty taste," says Kristen. "It's an interesting combination in your mouth."

Wine selection: DASHE Late Harvest Zinfandel, California, 14% alcohol, \$25.99

