

# The Cocoa Cure

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*Upscale Connecticut chocolatiers reinvent confections*

From artisanal hot chocolate to handcrafted truffles, local cocoa connoisseurs are busy churning out small batch confections that elevate and redefine the way we think about chocolate. Tschudin Chocolates in Middletown, Truffle Shots® in Essex, and Le Rouge in Westport all cleverly juxtapose classic favorites with complex flavor profiles to provide an experience that transcends the everyday chocolate experience.

[Tschudin Chocolates & Confections](#) highlights innovative flavors, exquisite presentation, and hands-on knowledge in a cozy shop on Middletown's historic Main Street. Beyond the luscious chocolate case, owner Roberto Tschudin Lucheme, a Food Network *ReWrapped* Champion and a *Sweet Genius* finalist, offers a series of classes to expose customers to the remarkable intricacies of his craft.

"If you understand why you're tempering the chocolate or why you're making the ganache a certain way, then by understanding the motions of doing it, you can focus on doing it right," he says, touting the value of pairing classroom instruction with firsthand experience.

Between delicate chocolate sculptures (hand-painted high heels are particularly popular), globally inspired truffles, and magnificent specialty confections, Tschudin offers an impressive range of options for the dessert enthusiast. The award-winning "Night in Tunisia" bonbon boasts ganache spiced with red chili, cardamom, and coriander and remains one of the shop's most popular varieties.

It's an interesting experience—really, a pinball for your taste buds," says Lucheme. From marzipan to honey caramels and truffles with fresh habanero and smoky chipotle, imagination and whimsy abound throughout the shop. Specialty confections include Tschudin's signature mango milk chocolate mousse cake. With its coffee base and a layer of caramelized pralines, it pairs perfectly with Tschudin's homemade hot chocolate. The indulgent European style elixir combines ganache, heavy cream, steamed milk, "and a lot of love," says Lucheme. "There's not a speck of cocoa powder."

From Middletown, a drive down Route 9 takes you to an inviting storefront on the Connecticut shoreline. At [Truffle Shots](#) in Essex, mother-daughter duo Sherri and Lauren Athay are breaking the mold, literally, of how we enjoy chocolate. "Years back, I took several recreational truffle making classes," recounts Sherri Athay. "Afterwards, we would make the truffles by pouring the ganache into their chocolate shells; once they set, we'd break them open, eat the inside and throw away the shells. We just wanted to get to the best part. So we thought, 'there has to be a better way.'"

Thinking outside the shell, as it were, Sherri's daughter, Lauren, began filling shot glasses with the silky chocolate ganache. With that revelation, Truffle Shots was born. Despite the name, these sweet delights are relished with a spoon, made without liqueur, and feature a semi-solid mix of chocolate, cream, and natural flavors. In their charming Essex shop, the Athays create handmade, small-batch treats that have caught the attention of local and international fans alike. In fall 2015, they represented Truffle Shots at the International Chocolate Awards in London, and returned to Connecticut with three awards from the World Finals.

With 30 rotating flavors, creative offerings include everything from buttered rum to bumbleberry, a dark chocolate ganache with a layer of raspberry, cherry, and blackcurrant gelée.

“The caramel beurre noisette is, by far, our best seller,” says Sherri. “We use a brown butter caramel that makes the flavor so rich and buttery, it’s irresistible.” The caramel beurre noisette, a sea-salted browned-butter caramel suspended in dark chocolate ganache, took home a silver award in October’s International Chocolate Awards. Athay’s personal favorite is the fig balsamico, another top seller with an unexpected, extremely satisfying flavor profile. “The balsamic vinegar in the ganache gives off a fruity note,” she says. “It reminds me of Venezuelan chocolate with hints of red berry.”

Nestled in a vibrant red and black hued café on Westport’s bustling Main Street, [Le Rouge by Aarti](#) presents a universal experience in the form of chocolate. Drawing inspiration from her Indian heritage and international travels, owner Aarti Khosla infuses her creations with flavors that span the globe. Khosla, a former economist, moved to Connecticut after living in Hong Kong for several years. She recognized a culinary gap in her new community.

“I found that even though we are in this wonderful area with very well traveled, educated people, there wasn’t much that caters to the international palate,” Khosla says. It seemed especially true with desserts. Instead of returning to her corporate job, she refocused her attention on chocolate and started Le Rouge.

Khosla’s truffles showcase an eclectic mix of familiar and exotic flavors designed for sophisticated tastes. “The idea was to start with inspiration from Indian cuisine,” she says. Her popular Heritage Collection features truffles delicately spiced with saffron, pistachio, masala chai, and preserved rose petals. An homage to her travels, she developed a popular Oriental Collection and selection of European inspired flavors. “I created the apple pie truffle for a Dutch friend and now it’s a top seller. The matcha green tea chocolate is also quite popular,” she says. “They are inspired by places I’ve traveled to and the flavors that have stayed with me.” Crafted using fair trade dark chocolate, Khosla individually hand paints each shimmering gem with intricate care.

Rich ganache cakes and airy French macarons share space in the truffle case, creating a sweet (and gluten-free) oasis for Khosla’s customers. The café offers a range of hot chocolates to complement the exquisite truffles and plated desserts.

“Raspberry white hot chocolate is one of my best sellers,” says Khosla, but the double dark hot chocolate and saffron pistachio white-hot chocolate are not far behind. With silky ribbons of melted chocolate pooling at the bottom of the mug, a to-go cup would not do the steamy beverage justice. It’s a drink best served and consumed inside a cozy café.

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