



The Event:

Our Holiday Event: a Chocolate Lover's Extravaganza

By Peter Mika

This holiday season cultivate your divine aspects by partaking of some chocolate. As you probably know, chocolate is a product of the cacao tree, *Theobroma cacao*—literally food of the gods. Some people claim medical benefits. I'm not convinced of that, but I do know one thing: it sure tastes good! Join us as we explore some of chocolate's subtleties.

Most chocolates are made from blends of cacao from different varieties and varying locations. Generally, the majority comes from the Forastero variety grown in equatorial countries around the world (Ivory Coast, Ghana, Indonesia, Brazil, Cameroon, Malaysia): the variety is highly productive and disease resistant, but lacks finesse. Flavor and aroma complexities are added by mixing in cacao from less productive, more fragile Criolla and Trinitario varieties grown in countries like Venezuela, Madagascar, Ecuador, Jamaica, and Trinidad. If you were to draw a wine analogy, this would be like trying to make a fine wine by blending in small amounts of juice from high quality grapes with a bulk wine. You'd end up with a serviceable wine, but nothing of fine wine quality. The story is the same with chocolate--if you want the best, you have to use the best ingredients, meaning the best varieties grown under the best conditions. Fortunately, such chocolates do exist and we will take this opportunity to try some of them.

Flight 1: In this flight we'll explore variation in cocoa content by tasting a line of chocolates from El Rey, a Venezuelan chocolate company. This will include a white chocolate, a milk chocolate (41% cacao), and 4 dark chocolates ranging from 58.5% to 73.5% cacao content. All these chocolates are made from cacao grown in the Carenero region of Venezuela east of Caracas.

Flight 2: Here we will taste chocolates from different regions of the world. Just like wine, a large portion of the quality of chocolate is due to the variety grown and the growing conditions (climate and soils). Chocolate makers have acknowledged this importance by producing chocolates from specific areas. We'll try some single estate chocolates by Valrhona (a French company) from Madagascar, Trinidad, and Venezuela and another set by Cluizel (another French company) from Venezuela, Sao Tome, and Santo Domingo.

Flight 3: Sure the chocolates taste different by themselves, but how different are they in a dessert. We'll try 4 versions of the same dessert (particulars to be decided) using dark chocolates (64 to 70% cacao) from the Caribbean islands, two areas in Venezuela, and Madagascar.

"What, no wine?" you ask. Of course not; this is an Enological Society event after all. A vintage character port will accompany flights 1 and 2. In the last flight, you can try the desserts with port, a fortified Muscat, a dry red, and some Hungarian Tokaji.

The event will be held at 7:00 pm on Saturday, December 13 at St. Mark's Episcopal Church. Costs will be \$20 for members and \$27 for guests. An announcement with registration coupon will be sent to you (email or snail mail) in late November.