

The Washington Post

Wednesday, February 7, 2007

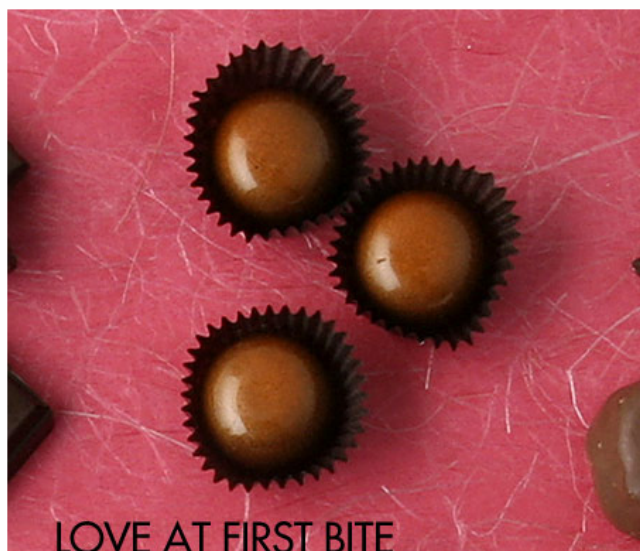
Taste Test: Fire and Chocolate

Today it's trendy to combine chocolate with chili peppers, but the pairing is ancient: Mayans and Aztecs mixed ground cacao seeds with chili peppers to make a spicy, frothy drink long before chocolate started being made in solid form. The same yin-and-yang balance is at play in the spiked confections made by modern chocolatiers.

We put together a tasting panel to sample a dozen brands (some locally available and some mail-ordered) that offer a chili-infused chocolate: some bars and some truffles, some with only the chili and chocolate flavors, and adding other spices, herbs and fruits to the mix. Besides Food section staffers Leigh Lambert and Joe Yonan, and Erin Hartigan of washingtonpost.com, we invited Lisa Scruggs, the executive pastry chef at Buzz; Katie Park, the specialty food buyer for the Curious Grape; and Leon Baker, pastry chef at Farrah Olivia.

Our favorites were the simplest: not too sweet and with few other flavors or textures to distract our attention from an addictive combination.

--Leigh Lambert



ARTISAN CONFECTIONS

Ancho chili chocolates (\$40, 24 pieces).

www.artisanconfections.com.

Caramel-like, with only a hint of chili and cinnamon; lingering heat.