

## I'm over £15 truffles, pass me my Wispa

High street versus choc-couture: where do you stand?

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What's wrong with an ordinary sugar and cocoa hit – has all this choco-poncification gone too far?

Very slowly, I remove the chilled chocolate comestible from the fridge and unfurl its purple, red and gold “plastique” wrapping to reveal — nestled so neatly that it is as if the wrapping were actually made for it — the clean lines of an elegantly elongated rectangle of “aerated” cocoa-plus-sugars-plus-fat-plus-saturates-plus-salt. It is the colour of ... of an unpolished conker ... this season's “It”-est bag ... the fretboard of an old Spanish acoustic guitar. But mostly it's the colour of ... a Cadbury's Wispa.

I love chocolate, although, as my paternal grandmother referred to refined sugar as “white death”, I grew up in a household where sweetness was in short supply. My lust was assuaged only by popping round to my neighbour Mandy McLaughlin's “sweet cupboard”: a glory hole in the kitchen, heaving with chocolate buttons.

Eventually I put away childish things — Noel Streatfeild, the Pony Club, Sindy — but I still retained a rush of affection for sugar-and-cocoa-laced products confectioned by the high street Wonkas. As the proverbial cheap chocolate date, I've only recently emerged from a two-year Snickers-a-thon (yet always a Marathon to me) interspersed by bouts of (140g bags) of Revels (chasing those surprising top notes of toffee). I am also crushing on Crunchies (unfurl, inhale, bite into honeycomb that tastes like the summer of 1975) and I have almost a lifetime of Twix under my belt (sadly you can tell; though I have no truck with those classic-with-a-

pointless-twist Twix Finos). And yes, I do find the occasional finger of Fudge just enough to give the kids (but mostly their mum) a treat.

And yet I appear to be increasingly alone among chocolate lovers in preferring the high street to choc-couture. Ten years ago, if you wanted something different, there was Green & Blacks and that was pretty much it. Now people happily buy £15 boxes of 16 truffles from Prestat; choc-pops for six quid that have been designed for the Notting Hill chocolatiers Melt by Celia Birtwell, no less; and £10 slabs of chocolate from Valrhona. Valrhona, you may like to know, helped the Burj Al Arab hotel in Dubai to come ninth in the 2007 list of most expensive desserts in the world by contributing the chocolate for its £30 (\$48) “chocolate sphere”. (The No 1 dessert included an 80-carat aquamarine, which is basically cheating).

Choco-poncification has gone too far. I object to the icky softsell beloved by **Amedei**, the Italian confectionary purveyors, for whom chocolate doesn't come in boxes but in “collections”, and whose prose evokes the same sensation as gorging on a jumbo bar of Dairy Milk at bedtime: “The colours and aromas of far-off lands will wrap you in their embrace. You'll feel them against your skin, even as the headiest of perfumes overwhelm your senses. The sensation of having tasted perfection makes itself felt slowly, evoking long-forgotten memories and opening the door to the wishes you've never dared express.”

Blimey, get a grip — I want to eat it, not sleep with it. There's a lot of this cac(ao) doing the rounds (excuse me while I race to Monsieur Pierre Hermé in Belgravia, where the Picasso of Pastry's autumn/ winter choc collection is now available).