

Where to get great chocolates for Valentine's Day



Valentine's Day chocolates from Valerie Confections. (Amy Scattergood / Los Angeles Times)



By **Amy Scattergood**

FEBRUARY 5, 2016, 8:00 AM

Sure, you can take your beloved out for a romantic dinner on Valentine's Day — or better yet, make it yourself. But for many of us, the best thing about this time of year is neither the hyped prix-fixe dinners nor the cliched bunches of flowers, but the chocolate. Chocolate makes any day worth celebrating, and chocolatiers have some pretty spectacular stuff on hand come February. Whether your tastes run to truffles, heart-shaped boxes, whole bars, chocolate fountains or even chocolate growlers, these 13 shops will have something for you, or the person you're shopping for, or ideally both. Get extra, because Valentine's Day can last longer than 24 hours if you have excellent chocolate on hand.

ChocoVivo — At her Culver City bean-to-bar chocolate shop, Patricia Tsai makes chocolate bars, either plain for baking or in various flavors. There's a tasting menu for eating on-site, using stone-ground chocolate that comes from a farm in Tabasco, Mexico. The chocolate also goes into mugs of hot chocolate or sipping chocolate. Although you can add dairy to the mugs, the bars themselves have no dairy or soy and are thus great for vegans

desperate for good chocolate. The shop feels like Groundwork Coffee Co., with beans and burlap and a counter to sit at and drink and sample from that chocolate tasting menu. If that's not reason enough to become a regular, you can also get the hot chocolate to go — in the form of chocolate growers. *12467 Washington Blvd., Culver City, (310) 845-6259, chocovivo.com.*

Compertes — Walk into Compartes chocolate shop inside Alfred Coffee and Kitchen on Melrose Place, and you'll be forgiven for thinking you've found the perfect hybrid of Willy Wonka, a Chanel boutique and a David Bowie music video (sigh). Owner Jonathan Gramh designed the place, which is lined with custom-made chocolate bars in many flavors and has a bathroom devoted to Marilyn Monroe. For Valentine's Day this year, Gramh has black-and-gold geometric heart-shaped boxes ("the most beautiful in the history of humanity," he says, modestly) filled with chocolates done in more geometrics and colors, including a swank tuxedo design. There are also bars handpainted in edible 24K gold, Kelly Wearstler-designed bars, and something called a Pink Elephants bar, which is topped with pink and white animal crackers. *8428 Melrose Place, West Hollywood, (323) 475-8986; 912 S. Barrington Ave., Brentwood, (310) 826-3380, compertes.com.*

Dylan's Candy Bar — If you have a preteen or teenage daughter, you've probably spent a lot of time in this upscale sweets shop at the Original Farmers Market. The shop, owned by Dylan Lauren, daughter of Ralph, opened in 2012 as the L.A. outpost of her New York candy boutique. It's a brightly colored fun-house place, loaded with novelty candy, chocolate, help-yourself bins and tables filled with seasonal sweets, including quite a selection for Valentine's Day. They have cake pops and an ice cream window — with new flavors for the holiday — if you want a cone while you shop at the nearby Grove. *6333 W. 3rd St., Los Angeles, (323) 930-1600, dylanscandybar.com.*

Edelweiss Chocolates — This old-school Beverly Hills chocolate shop began life in 1942 as Candy Roundup, and if you walk through the shop from the back, as do the regulars, you can see the original machines, which are all still in use. Lucille Ball did this one day when the 1940s-era chocolate enrober was malfunctioning and got the idea for her famous 1952 "I Love Lucy" episode, "Job Switching," which is why there's a picture of Ball above the machine now. The shop's second owner was Swiss, and he's the one who renamed the place and added European-style chocolate to the repertoire. Now owned by the Zahir family, Edelweiss continues to make classic chocolates using the original equipment and offers around 85 types of chocolate candies, including their popular chocolate-covered pretzels. New this year: more handmade heart boxes, and a raspberry-marshmallow heart chocolate. A second shop opened in the Brentwood Country Mart in 2005. *444 N. Cañon Drive, Beverly Hills, (310) 275-6003, edelweisschocolates.com.*

Jin Patisserie — Since Jin Patisserie closed shop in 2013 on Abbot Kinney Boulevard in Venice, it's been a bit harder to find Kristy Choo's glorious French macarons and chocolates. But they've hardly disappeared, just relocated. Now in an industrial complex in Culver City, Jin Patisserie operates a tiny retail shop at its production facility, where it does mostly wholesale business and is open six days a week to the public. There you can pick up Choo's macarons, cookies and cakes, and selections of her chocolates, all made with Swiss Felchlin chocolate and in a variety of flavors and patterns. New this year: an edible chocolate box. *5741 Buckingham Parkway, Suite D, Culver City, (310) 399-8801, jinpatisserie.com.*

Joan's on Third — Joan McNamara has been operating Los Angeles' version of Dean & DeLuca since 1998, providing us all with great food, catering and exquisite gifts both from her original shop on 3rd Street and her second shop in Studio City. You can find chocolate in the form of brownies, cookies, cupcakes, roulade and cake slices. And on the counters and racks and shelves, which McNamara fills with gift items, there are Valentine's candies, bonbons, heart-shaped cookies and those old-fashioned little conversation hearts we all used to get as kids. *8350 W. 3rd St., Los Angeles, (323) 655-2285; 12059 Ventura Place, Studio City, (818) 201-3900, joansonthird.com.*

John Kelly Chocolates — John Kelly Chocolates began life over decade ago as a wholesale chocolate factory in a small location in Hollywood. Now owners John Kelson and Kelly Green (the company name is a combination of their first names) have a retail shop next to that factory as well as another location in Santa Monica. Their signature Belgian chocolate is something called truffle fudge, and the pair fashion it into various exquisite iterations. They also make walnut caramel clusters, chocolate and peanut butter bars, tiny chocolate frogs and butterflies, chocolate-dipped dried apricots and figs and shortbread. You can also get gift towers, which look like the Platonic ideal of those [Harry & David](#) stacked boxes your relatives send you for Christmas. New this year: solid bars of chocolate, in both dark and milk chocolate. *1508 N. Sierra Bonita Ave., Los Angeles, (323) 851-3269; 1111 1/2 Montana Ave., Santa Monica, (310) 899-0900, johnkellychocolates.com.*

L'Artisan du Chocolat — Christian Alexandre and his wife, Whajung Park, have been making exquisite chocolates since 2001, first for Picholine (where the two met) and now at their own store, a tiny shop next to Valerie Confection on 1st Street in the Westlake neighborhood. The couple — he's a former mayor from France, she's from South Korea and trained in Paris as a chocolatier — make chocolate the traditional French way, with no preservatives and relatively little sugar. The chocolates come in a variety of flavors, from traditional to more unusual, including anise-honey, ginseng, hazelnut, lavender, rose, matcha, pomegranate, Earl Grey, goji berry, cucumber-vodka, speculoos and bacon — all stenciled with pretty colored patterns. And for Valentine's Day, there are chocolate-filled heart-shaped boxes. *3364 W. 1st St., Los Angeles, (213) 252-8721, lartisanduchocolat.net.*

Little Flower Candy Co. — Christine Moore's Pasadena shop is a neighborhood cafe with great sandwiches, salads and baked goods. But it's also a fantastic gift shop, stocked with seasonal candies, chocolates and frilly things — and Moore's sea salt caramels and marshmallows, which engendered her shop in the first place. For Valentine's Day, the place has been reconfigured with hearts and lots of pink, including old-fashioned Sweatharts candies and lots of chocolates. *1422 W. Colorado Blvd., Pasadena, (626) 304-4800, littleflowercandyco.com.*

Lolli and Pops — This shop is a hybrid of two worlds: the contemporary universe of indoor shopping that is the Glendale Galleria and the Old World charm of a shop that's decorated in wood and hand-lettered chalk signs, where the person bagging your chocolates is dressed like an early 20th century soda jerk. Lolli and Pops has (appropriately) a soda fountain, chocolates and candies sourced from around the world, and tables and shelves filled with very cute things, such as teddy bears and giant lollipops, and candy cases filled with chocolate-covered strawberries, marzipan, petits fours and more — including, this year, a new selection

of aphrodisiac chocolate truffles. Enough said, I guess. *1128 Glendale Galleria, Glendale, (818) 546-1813, lolliandpops.com.*

Mignon — Mignon is a lovely old-fashioned shop, or rather two of them: the original in Glendale, which has been open for a dozen years, and a more recent outpost in Pasadena. Both shops carry a large selection of chocolates, filled and flavored (matcha, saffron marzipan, Cuban mojito, etc.) and often stenciled with pretty patterns. There are Valentine's Day boxes, including one filled with red Champagne-ganache-filled chocolate lips. Or, if you're having a really big party for your loved one, you can rent a chocolate fountain, which includes not only the fountain and the chocolate but also a “professional chocolate host.” New this year: You can build your own 30-piece chocolate heart. *315 N. Verdugo Road, Glendale, (818) 549-9600; 6 E. Holly St., Pasadena, (626) 796-7100, mignonchocolate.com.*

Sweet — It helps to have a kid with you when you navigate this huge candy shop in the Hollywood & Highland complex on Hollywood Boulevard, for morale, for inspiration and because it can be overwhelming if you're not 13. There's a lot here: a giant portrait of Eminem made out of M&M's; a portrait of Zach Galifianakis made out of gummy bears; a Chocolate Lab (yes, there are pictures of Labradors) where you can build your own chocolate bars and watch them being made; a TV that loops that “I Love Lucy” candy episode; and all the displays of hard candies, chocolates, and lots and lots of merchandise. They also have a new RuPaul pop-up shop and an Elvira boutique. *6801 Hollywood Blvd., Suite 201, Los Angeles, (323) 462-3111, sweetlosangeles.com.*

Valerie Confections — Valerie Gordon and her partner, Stan Weightman Jr., started out with a toffee business, and they now have three shops selling chocolates, pastries, confections and lunch. The epicenter of the business is in Westlake on 1st Street, in a cute 4,000-square-foot shop, chocolate factory and bakery. There, Gordon and her staff have, among other things, five chocolate-dipping stations, where they make their chocolate candies, all blended from their unique mixture of Valrhona, Guittard and Noel chocolates. For the holiday, they make special boxes filled with various chocolates, including truffles and caramels — as well as chocolates shaped like hearts and golden roses. *3360 W. 1st St., Los Angeles, (213) 739-8149, and two other locations, valerieconfections.com.*

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