

Get a Taste Inside the ChocoVivo Chocolate Factory

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Welcome to the wonderfully chocolaty world of Patricia Tsai. Having started her own bean-to-bar chocolate company more than five years ago, Tsai recently opened a new [ChocoVivo](#) factory, tasting bar and retail shop in Culver City. You can watch the chocolatiers grind cocoa nibs into creamy, slightly gritty pastes, see sheets of fruit, nuts and spiced chocolates cut into bars and squares, and sit for a cup of hot or cold drinking chocolate. There isn't a chocolate river, but we think Willy Wonka would be proud.

What makes ChocoVivo chocolate so unique is the process. Tsai sources her cocoa nibs directly from a grower in Tabasco, Mexico, where they're roasted and sent to her directly. In the shop, Tsai and her staff grind the nibs into a paste similar to the way the Mayans and Aztecs did it more than 2,000 years ago. There are no fillers, additives or powders involved; no over-processing or tempering. She adds natural spices, nuts and dried fruits like blood orange and cherries, and there you have it. Simple, delicious pure dark chocolate in flavors like almond and sea salt, black sesame and goji berry, cherry and black peppercorn, coffee and vanilla bean, and blood orange and tonka bean, an ingredient so good it's illegal (but [used](#) by José Andrés and Grant Achatz).

The space is fun and bright, half a factory where you can see all the action happening, and the other half filled with items like chocolate bars, hot chocolate powders, Tsai's famous chocolate butters, and even cocoa nib necklaces. Sidle up to the bar and order a tasting - you can choose from three or six thin little squares, all packing a punch of real unadulterated chocolate - or get something from the drink bar, like an iced hot chocolate or a thick European-style sipping chocolate. For those who want the most pure way to drink your chocolate, try the 100% pure cacao with filtered water. Anyone who finishes it will be called a Mayan Warrior and probably feel like building a few pyramids.

Starting tonight, hit the ChocoVivo Frozen Hot Chocolate Social Hour, which will feature four special chocolates (simple chocolate, Shangri-la, Mayan, coffee-and-vanilla) topped with Straus organic vanilla bean ice cream. Samplings also will be available for \$20 a person Thursday through Sunday, Sept. 12-15, 11 AM-9 PM; RSVP at info@chocovivo.com. Consider this your dessert after a burger and cocktail from [The Corner Door](#) next door or [A-Frame](#) and [Waterloo & City](#) a block away.

Tsai showed us how the chocolate magic happens. Take a look below.



It's all about the process.



Watch the chocolate magic happen from inside the shop. Once a week (more often during the holidays), Tsai and her team grind the cocoa nibs for chocolate bars, tasters and powders.



Plenty to look at and take home from the retail shelves, including cocoa nib necklaces, chocolate butters, hot chocolate powders and more.



Tsai shows us how ChocoVivo chocolates are made. **Step 1:** Get the cocoa nibs from Mexico, where they're grown and roasted.



Step 2: Add them to the grinder with vanilla and sweetener. Grind at least five times for the right consistency.



Step 3: Smooth a layer of chocolate on a sheet pan and let it rest.



Step 4: Give the pans a little shake to settle the oils.



Step 5: Cool the chocolates. This cherry with almond and black peppercorn is pretty divine.



Tasting sampler at the bar.



Oompa Loompas only!



Tsai at her new factory and shop.



Pure 100% cacao with filtered water. This is the most intense chocolate drink you'll find anywhere. No sweetener, just unadulterated cacao. If you finish the whole cup, you'll be known as a Mayan Warrior. You may want to build a few pyramids after - the stuff gives you as much of a jolt as a pot of coffee.



Chocolate purity.



Frozen hot chocolate samplers, all made with milk and a dollop of vanilla bean ice cream. Available daily at the shop.

culver city

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patricia tsai