



For the Love of Chocolate

By James Pallas

Valentine's Day just wouldn't be the same without a romantic card, a bunch of flowers and a gift of chocolate. But woe-betide any man who thinks he can get away with just a token box of Milk Tray or Black Magic. If she's someone special in your life you need to show it – and that means only the best will do!

The romance of chocolate? "I think it is the utter decadence of eating something which is seen to be a real treat!" says Amelia Rope, whose eponymous products have won two Golds, a Silver and a Bronze medal for her Pale Lemon and Sea Salt, Pale Rose, Dark Ginger and Dark Lemon chocolates, respectively.

In fact she's just been asked to join the prestigious Academy of Chocolate where Michelin-starred chef, Michel Roux, is the patron.

For this year's Valentine's Day she has an exclusive offer from the Conran Shop: her *Pale Sea Salt Collection* of chocolate cubes is presented in red foil; all, that is, except one which is in white foil. The selection includes the award-winning *Pale Lemon* and popular *Pale Lime* varieties along with *Pale Sea Salt*. Price £39.

Online customers may order *Limited Edition 100* bars at £11.95. These come in a special Valentine's wrapping with a dark brown card on which she will write your personal message, and a red glass bead. Order now for delivery by Friday 14 February.

Chocolate is as old as the Aztecs, and the earliest documented use of cocoa seeds (from which cocoa is derived) is around 1100BC. It arrived in Europe in 1585 but was so expensive that few but royalty and the nobility could afford it.

The first chocolate house opened in London in 1657. Milk chocolate was introduced by the Swiss in 1875.



Most of us remember first eating chocolate bars when small children, thanks to a process invented by the Cadbury family in the eighteenth century. But the cheap and highly-processed brands bear little relation to the luxury brands which have become so popular in recent years with a much higher cocoa content.

Joanne Harris's delightful 1999 novel, *Cbocolat*, turned in to a film the following year, only added to its cachet.

Amelia attended a course in France, at Valrhona, and was hooked. Now she has a "daily prescription" of the fruits of the Theobroma Cacao tree, which translates as *Food for the Gods*.

Eaten in moderation, chocolate is good for the circulation and in reducing blood pressure, lowering cholesterol and enhancing the brain, so it's also a health food as well as a special treat. By producing serotonin it can promote a natural feel-good factor. And no sugar rushes!

And if you're lucky, your amorous partner will want to share your thoughtful gift with you.

As well as the Conran Shop's special Valentine offer, regular stockists of Amelia Rope's chocolates include Liberty, Selfridges, Fortnum & Mason, Heal's, Wholefoods and Barrecore.

Online orders are usually despatched within 24 hours by First Class delivery. Delivery charge is £4.95. Online Orders: www.ameliarope.com

'Cocoa' is what comes from 'cacao' trees – note spelling, please, as both are used in the text. *Cbocolat* – the novel and film – is the correct spelling (it's French)!