



## HOT NEW CAFE MINK CHOCOLATES

BY CASSANDRA ANDERTON PHOTOS: TERRI POTRATZ

If you are the type that grabs your java from 7-Eleven along with a random chocolate bar full of preservatives and artificial flavours, this new café and chocolate shop won't interest you. In fact, unless you wish to be liberated from said routine, you should stay far away from Mink Chocolates and Mink Café — or face the possibility of severe lifestyle change. Although this place is far from pretentious, these people question not only how the coffee and chocolate tastes, but where the cocoa and coffee beans are sourced from. The result? Delectable chocolate and remarkably fresh-tasting coffee, all from ethically sourced cocoa and coffee beans.

Owner Marc Lieberman opened Mink Café this spring after a lifetime of chocolate and coffee addiction. The original owner of Steamrollers (low-fat wrap chain), he obviously had a sense of the health trend in Vancouver and some business sense to back it up. The café is focused on two things and two things only: coffee and handmade chocolate bars. There's no attempt to be more than "a marriage of two noble beans," as Lieberman put it.

Stroll into the 30-seat café (with a patio holding an additional 18) and enjoy a coffee or hot chocolate. The espresso comes from Ethical Bean and the regular coffees are brewed on a cup-to-cup basis in the expensive, but worth the price, Clover machine. Lieberman brings in a variety of coffees such as the Doy Chaang Peaberry from Northern Thailand, and beans from Better Life Coffee, a local company that sources ethically from all over the world. There's also a selection of Mighty Leaf organic, black and herbal teas, real hot chocolate made with the chocolate melted right into the milk,

and some iced coffees.

And then there's the chocolate. Mink's chocolate bars are all handmade and attractively packaged. Flavours range from the P.B. hint of J. (non-hydrogenated peanut butter and organic grape jelly in milk chocolate) to the Sporting Life (a bar that incorporates dark chocolate with a chocolate stout and salted pretzel). Secretaries stop in to pick up a No Grumpy, filled with organic espresso, for their bosses, and husbands the Certifiably Nutty for their good-humoured wives. There is something for everyone among the 33 flavours. There's even a group working their way through all the flavours and collecting all the labels.

It's all relatively guilt-free as well because the chocolate bars are only 50 grams and, after all, studies have proven cocoa beans contain flavonols and antioxidants, which reducing high blood pressure and hypertension. You are doing your body a favour by indulging.

Mink also does individual bon bons and gift boxes and is known for its chocolate fondue and Belgian waffles.

If you haven't had your chocolate or coffee fix yet today, please avoid 7-Eleven and do both your body and your tastebuds a favour. Head immediately to Mink Café at 863 West Hastings St. and start a wrapper collection of your own.



## WINE DIVA JUNE TOP PICK

By DAENNA VAN MULLIGEN

Apparently the sun has finally decided to make a re-appearance. So we're pulling out the barbecues, dusting them off and setting the stage for an ongoing summer grill-a-thon.

On sunny days under patio umbrellas white is nice; it cools you down without putting you down for a siesta. But the evening is a different story. Grilled foods and milder temperatures call for something a bit more... potent. Something that stands up to char-grill, spice rubs and cheeky, picante sauces, something warm and spicy in its own right — Shiraz!

Most people have already figured out that Syrah (French name, classically Rhone Valley region) and Shiraz (primarily recognized from Aussie and South Africa) are one and the same. It's merely the style that seems to vary depending on region of origin and winemaking style. Shiraz tends to be spicier with jammy, up-front berry fruit and chocolate; Syrah tends toward earthy flavours, savoury herbs and plums.

So what does a new world winemaker do? My experience tells me wines are labelled as per the style in which they are created, which is why you often see Shiraz and Syrah being produced in the same region. And you don't have to travel all the way to Oz to get a great bottle for your barbie — we make some ripsnorters within driving distance!

**Jackson Triggs Proprietors' Reserve Shiraz, Okanagan Valley, 2005** (\$19.99, widely available, +593103) A luscious and inky, opaque purple colour with intense aromas to match. This is the best kind of combination: the elegance of traditional Syrah with the fruit and spice of a modern Shiraz. Rich plum and sweet black cherry, fresh-turned earth and cracked pepper. On the palate it is full-bodied and smooth with sweet vanilla and warm spice, cocoa and coffee flavours, followed with fine, smooth tannins on the finish.

[www.winediva.ca](http://www.winediva.ca)

## JUICE YOUR IPOD

Technology wins again — even when it's the grape you're battling!

The Food Vancouver "best-kept restaurant secrets" website has managed to jump the barrel with its new iPod Wine Guide, a free downloadable list that gives you an easy carry-along selection of 12,000 wines sold in B.C., by price, by style or by region.

Food Vancouver makes it simple with a step-by-step guide. Simply click on the dancing iPod and follow the instructions. Food Vancouver even links you to our local Wine Diva's site in case you need some additional tasting notes.

Now, as a wine geek, I must admit this is an amazing accessory to have in your pocket or purse. The ability to track a new wine, a wine you've had (but forgotten in a purple haze), or a price-sensitive option for your Monday-to-Wednesday quaff is very cool.

Just imagine, your wine repertoire will be endless, your wine savvy unquestionable. [www.foodvancouver.com](http://www.foodvancouver.com)

— Daenna Van Mulligen