

CHOCOLATE

Food of the Gods

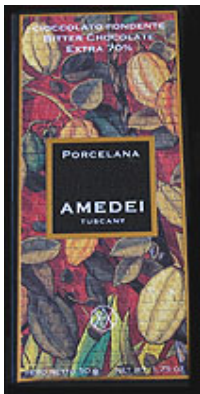
Amedei Chocolates from Tuscany

By Alain Gayot

Let's say you're at an art show. Does knowing the background of a certain painting make you appreciate it more? It certainly heightens the aesthetic experience. This is true for any art form, even chocolate. Imagine a piece of Amedei Porcelana is melting in your mouth. It certainly is darkly delicious. But what happens once you find out it's made from the most expensive chocolate in the world? Suddenly it tastes just a little more luxurious, doesn't it? This chocolate journeyed a long way from Italy, where it was carefully crafted in a family-run operation. But before it ever became a chocolate bar, it started as a rare, translucent, white Criollo bean in Venezuela. And so the story of Amedei begins.



Organic chocolate made from Criollo beans



Porcelana

The Tuscan company was started in 1990 by brother-and-sister team Alessio and Cecilia Tessieri, who had no prior chocolate making experience and who named their company in honor of their grandmother. Their mission was to create the best possible chocolate on earth, to work under a stringent corporate philosophy and to insure fair conditions for their farmers. Searching for immaculate sources in Ecuador, the Caribbean and elsewhere, in 2000 they came upon land in Venezuela boasting 200,000 Criollo trees, and Alessio bought the exclusive rights. At nearly \$12 for 100-gram bar, Porcelana is made entirely from these Venezuelan Criollo beans, dubbed "food of the gods," a mere 3,000 kilograms of which are produced annually.

Besides the Porcelana, Amedei offers many other luxurious sweet and semi-sweet treats. Among these are five kinds of chocolate bars or *tavolette*; pralines with flavors like grappa, ginseng and rum; six kinds of truffles coated in smooth Amedei chocolate; miniature 30-gram boxes of dark or milk chocolate and Chuao, which along with Porcelana, is made from exclusive Venezuelan beans. For an even more exotic extravagance, Amedei offers Cru, a collection of six types of chocolates, each made from a different cocoa variety from places like Ecuador, Madagascar and Trinidad.

While Cecilia runs the factory, located near Pisa, Alessio continues to travel the world, ever searching for the best beans and equipment while creating close relationships with the farms and villages they source from. Amedei is not only concerned with creating an exclusive, organic product, but also with assuring that farmers who grow the trees and harvest the beans are offered fair working and living conditions. This might help make you feel better about indulging in such extravagant chocolate. After all, if the taste is superior and the all-natural product was made conscientiously, what's not to love?



Cocoa beans on their way to becoming Amedei chocolate



The Amedei Plant in Tuscany

▶ You'll find Amedei Chocolate at upscale gourmet stores and in pastries at fine restaurants such as The French Laundry. For more information visit www.amedei.it