

TASTE TEST

Favorite boxed chocolates

Turns out we Westerners are a loyal bunch when it comes to our Valentine's Day sweets—dotting the region are dozens of high-quality chocolatiers, each with a fervent following.

We vetted the best for extra-special treats. After narrowing the field to 13 worthy competitors based on ingredients and technique, we conducted our own tasting, scoring the chocolate's quality, range and balance of flavors, artfulness of packaging, and good value for the price. —AMY TRAVERSO

OUR TOP PICK

Recchiuti Confections

WHY: Rich, deep flavors; innovative, alluring fillings; and masterful execution—clearly, industry pioneer Michael Recchiuti's San Francisco company is at the top of its game. "They're the future of chocolate," as one taster put it.

FAVORITE FLAVORS: Sesame nougat (built on a sliver-thin layer of crisp sesame caramel), star anise and pink peppercorn, burnt caramel

GIVE THEM TO: Anyone you want to impress—your boss, your future in-laws

PRICE: \$40 for the 16-piece Valentine's Box

CONTACT: www.recchiuti.com or 800/500-3396

A SWEET CHOICE

Charles Chocolates

WHY: These charming, handcrafted, small-batch sweets by Emeryville, CA, chocolatier Chuck Siegel inspired instant loyalty. Top-quality chocolate is paired in exquisite proportion with flavors such as Earl Grey and peanut praline.

FAVORITE FLAVORS: Raspberry hearts, bittersweet peanut butterflies

GIVE THEM TO: Your spouse, your mom, anyone else who deserves some sweet love

PRICE: \$27 for a 1/2-pound box (about 21 pieces)

CONTACT: www.charleschocolates.com or 510/652-4412

FOR THE SOPHISTICATE

Jin Patisserie

WHY: Nestled in bento-style boxes, these hand-painted jewels from L.A. pastry chef Kristy Choo explode with exotic, Asian-accented flavors such as mango-basil and jasmine.

FAVORITE FLAVORS: Ginger, caramel clove, pandan (a leaf that tastes a little like a spicy vanilla bean)

GIVE THEM TO: The artists and aesthetes in your life

PRICE: \$25 for a 12-piece box

CONTACT: www.jinpatisserie.com or 310/399-8801

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