



BY LINDA BARRETT



Chef Tiptur

Chocolate: THE PERFECT FOOD

The Conche restaurant delights chocolate lovers with both savory and sweet masterpieces.

When I learned about a chocolate-themed boutique restaurant in Leesburg, I was all in, and scheduled a visit to The Conche. After all, who doesn't love chocolate? I had no idea, however, the intricacies of cooking with chocolate and was quite pleasantly surprised to both learn about it and taste the sumptuous creations of celebrity chef/owner Santosh Tiptur.

Entering the restaurant, you first notice the glass-front case displaying handcrafted chocolates and the working conche machine. Then you are met with a sensual, but delicate, aroma of chocolate that foretells good things to come and a peek into the bustling Chocolate Lab.

Knowing that The Conche was all about chocolate, my dinner companion and I wondered if each dish would either be smothered in chocolate or taste like chocolate. That was not the case. As we learned from Chef Tiptur, chocolate beans are similar to wine grapes and coffee, and take on the essences and flavors provided by the local terroir in their growing region. Chocolate beans from Africa can be slightly bitter, while beans from South America can display a tropical-fruity character. The chef expertly incorporates subtle notes into each dish.

Our meal began with a set of incredible cocktails. The Allure was a fruity concoction served in a tall glass shrouded in pink cotton candy. The Soot & Rye combined rye, sweet vermouth, and spiced cinnamon syrup in a glass with a hand-cut block of ice to which the smoke from Applewood chips soaked in Grand Marnier was infused tableside.

The Sweet & Sour Cauliflower appetizer arrived served on a delicious bed of crispy greens. It had an Asian influence and a perfectly-crisp coating, not unlike General Tso's chicken. The Tempura Fried Brussel Sprouts were lightly battered and tender, and won over my companion



who claimed he “didn’t like Brussel sprouts... until now.”

For our beef entrée, we chose the Cocoa Rubbed NY Strip Steak in a chocolate burgundy reduction served with sautéed broccoli and roasted garlic and goat cheese potato puree. The reduction perfectly complemented the tender beef with both a hint of chocolate and heat on the finish.

Our seafood entrée, the Shrimp Tagliatelle, combined large, tender bourbon garlic shrimp with a tornado of tagliatelle pasta coated with a Tomato Brava sauce. We also got to sample the Spiced Crispy Pork Belly wrapped in soft, steamed cacao nibs buns and served on a white balsamic and cherry thyme compote.

What was amazing were the complexities of flavors and textures within each dish. This was not your average meal. It was true artistry.

Save Room for Dessert!

The Sweet Finale menu features a number of chocolate-themed desserts each named after a type of chocolate, and we ooh and aahed our way through our selections.

The Opalys featured portions of warm Medjool date & toffee pudding, ginger salted caramel ice cream, and a sable Breton in a bourbon butterscotch sauce, served with a white chocolate vanilla bean foam to use like whipped cream. Handmade chocolate flourishes adorned each item.

With the Jivara, we were instructed to make sure every forkful included each element of this multi-layered dessert, which resulted in an explosion of flavors in the mouth. Layers of chocolate cake and milk chocolate ganache, accented by passion fruit sorbet and gelée in a

pool of passion fruit caramel left us wanting more.

To go all out, order The Conche Entremet. At \$48 it is one of the most expensive desserts on the menu, but also one of the most intriguing, and large enough to be shared with the table. Layer after layer of chocolate, cake, ice creams and accents are carefully placed into a dark chocolate sphere. Rolled to your table on a golden cart, it is doused with flaming liquor which melts the outer shell to reveal the delights hidden inside and create a pool of molten chocolate. It is then drizzled with caramel and chocolate sauces.

Guests can watch the pastry chef’s chocolate-making and dessert processes in the 300-foot glass-fronted Chocolate Lab, where chocolate-making classes for adults and children are also held.

About Chef Tiptur

Growing up in India, Chef Santosh Tiptur can well recall his first experience with chocolate, “I remember placing a Cadbury Éclair into my mouth and began to wonder how delicious candies like this were made. I dreamed that one day I would learn how to make them myself.”

Following culinary school, Tiptur followed that dream and became one of the world’s noted pastry chefs, known for his whimsical sweet and savory culinary creations and over-the-top sugar and chocolate sculptures—several of which are on display at The Conche. His career took him around the world, with positions at luxury cruise lines including Cunard and Seabourn and hotels like the Ritz-Carlton encouraging his creativity. Most recently, he was the executive chef/pastry





The Name: THE CONCHE

The restaurant is named The Conche after one of the processes chocolate must go through to improve its quality. As you enter the restaurant, notice the case displaying a Longitudinal Agitator, known today as a Conche, or Longitudinal Conche, in action. Custom made for Tiptur in Switzerland, it demonstrates the prolonged churning and stirring process, otherwise known as conching, that disperses unwanted substances from the cocoa mass and ensures the homogenous distribution of cocoa butter. Without conching, we would not be tasting the high-quality chocolate we enjoy and embrace today.

chef at Co Co. Sala in Washington, D.C., where he created eclectic and extravagant menus revolving around chocolate.

Tiptur's talents in pastry artistry secured him a place on the 2009 National Pastry Team Championship and in the 2010 New York Chocolate Show. He has appeared on the CBS Early Show, NBC Today and in culinary competitions The Food Network. He was the winner of Halloween Wars 2016.

About The Conche

Chef Tiptur's dream always included owning his own restaurant, and he fulfilled that vision by opening the 76-seat, 2,880-square-foot The Conche in May 2017 in The Village at Leesburg. Chocolate resonates even in the décor, with cream-colored tufted banquettes, milk chocolate-colored walls, chocolate-cage lighting fixtures, and confection-themed posters. A beautiful lighted bar invites casual dining or relaxation with a signature cocktail. Seasonally, menus change and special items like European-style hot chocolate are added for the cooler months.

If you are looking for a memorable experience, you must try some of Chef Tiptur's creations. If nothing else, stop by for an unforgettable dessert. The Conche is sure to delight. ❖