

SFGate.com www.sfgate.com

[com](#) [Return to regular view](#)

[Chocolate and beer: A wonderful duo?](#)

[Cocoa Pete Slosberg says you've got to try it](#)

- Emily Wilson, Special to The Chronicle
Friday, February 6, 2004



The man who's famous for Pete's Wicked Ale has come up with a wicked combination -- one that sounds deadly to taste buds and stomachs alike. But Pete Slosberg insists that certain beers actually go very well with his latest passion: chocolate.

Four years after selling his brewing company, Slosberg created Cocoa Pete's Chocolate Adventures in Campbell in late 2002. And next week, Cocoa Pete himself will offer a dinner combining beer and chocolate at Pyramid Alehouse in Walnut Creek.

Slosberg will begin Tuesday's dinner with a short talk he calls "Chocolate 101." As he did with his beer business, Slosberg has created a chart to show the different varieties and tastes of chocolate. Then diners will try those chocolates, paired with ales and porters.

After careful tasting, Slosberg says that Pyramid India Pale Ale goes perfectly with his Maltimus Maximus, a malted milk ball, and that Pyramid Mount Diablo Porter nicely compliments Hallowed Grounds, which has coffee and caramel.

Initially, many people find the idea of munching chocolate and sipping beer less than appealing, Slosberg admits, but he says they are won over when they open their minds -- and their mouths.

His Cocoa Pete's business partner, Scott Barnum, says it's the quality of the beers and the chocolates that makes the difference in combining them.

"Most of us think of Hershey's and Miller and go, 'Eeew,'" Barnum said. "But it's amazing how well they can go together."

Slosberg's first foray into these brewers dinners, held recently at the 21st Amendment

Brew Pub in San Francisco -- where guests feasted on courses including green salad with walnuts, reggiano cheese and shaved dark chocolate, cocoa risotto with mushrooms, and beef stew with stout, burgundy and chocolate -- was beyond his expectations.

"We want to show chocolate is good and beer is good and when they are paired well, they are incredible," he said. "It was magical. It opened people's eyes and they left full, brimming and smiling."

Mark Carlson was one of those satisfied -- and surprised -- customers. He stopped in for a beer with a friend to console himself after an Oakland Raiders' loss, and ended up staying.

"Drinking the beer with the chocolate didn't strike me as a good idea," he said. "But they talked about, 'Oh, you should try this one with that one,' and talk about how it's playing across the tongue and I was like, 'Wow, they're right.' I never would have tried it on my own."

Carlson enjoyed the dinner as well.

"I ate things I never thought I would," he said. "I looked at the menu and I thought, 'I'll hit In-N-Out on the way home,' but it was great. There was this black bean soup with chocolate whipped cream that was awesome, truly awesome."

Chef Eddie Blyden says the menu was so successful, the pub is re-creating it for a Valentine's Day dinner.

"Stout is born to go with chocolate," he said. "I'm very glad working here. Like a lot of restaurant people, I had a wine background and I've learned a lot about working with beer. There are a lot of refined beers."

At Tuesday's event, after their chocolate lesson and some "beertails," diners will try such delicacies as winter squash soup with cocoa cream and chili-chocolate dusted halibut.

Maggie Ward-Smith of Pyramid says that what Slosberg wants to do with these dinners goes nicely with what the brewpub does.

"At Pyramid we pride ourselves on having a beer for every occasion," she said. "For fans of craft beers, they are not only for drinking, but also to enjoy with food. Pete's a great fit, definitely."

One of the brewers at Pyramid, Bart Malloy, says beer -- like chocolate -- can have complex flavors.

"Beer can go with a variety of foods, not just pizza and nachos," Malloy said. "You can have all kinds of tastes from a really heavy, syrupy, sweet one to something that is very dry and crisp. You have a real range of flavors."

Slosberg says he is looking forward to the dinner.

"I like educating people; I like breaking down barriers," he said. "I hate people's reluctance to trying new things."

Slosberg is convinced that Americans will be won over by his use of quality ingredients in his chocolate, just as they were with his beer. In Europe, Slosberg says, even mass-produced chocolate is good, thanks to the high percentage of cacao. His product is based on that model, and he hopes Americans will trade up from a Snickers, say, and reach for a Nuts So Serious, with hazelnuts and pistachios, when they have a yen for something sweet.

Part of Slosberg's marketing strategy as Wicked Pete was talking to customers about his beer. As Cocoa Pete, he does the same thing. About once a week he goes to stores to give out samples and tell people about the chocolate adventure that awaits them.

"I like to have fun with people," he said. "So I say, 'Are you wearing socks today?' and they look at me like, 'What planet are you on?' and I say, 'Well, our chocolate is so good it will knock your socks off,' and they smile and try some. The best way for people to know about it is word of mouth, so we have to get it in people's mouths so they can talk about it."

These dinners are another way of increasing word of mouth, Slosberg said.

"In the beer business, you have beer festivals, but what can we do with chocolate that can garner attention? I thought, 'Let's try beer and chocolate dinners.' Nobody else is doing beer and chocolate."

Slosberg has dinners lined up in Seattle, Sacramento and Southern California.

"It's an eye-opening experience for people," he said. "We hope people who come talk to 10 friends and tell them, 'Hey, you know what I did last weekend?' "

Sweet details

Space is limited for the chocolate-beer dinner, which begins at 6 p.m. Tuesday at Pyramid Alehouse, 1410 Locust St., Walnut Creek. The cost is \$40 plus gratuities. For details, call

Scott Barnum at (408) 626-2206 or Pyramid at (925) 946-1520. For details about Cocoa Pete's, visit its Web site at www.cocoapetes.com.

E-mail comments to penfriday@sfchronicle.com

Page E - 9

URL: <http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2004/02/06/PNGVA4NSRG1.DTL>

[©2005 San Francisco Chronicle](#)