

COOL HUNTING



FOOD + DRINK

K+M Extravirgin Chocolate Bars

**Thomas Keller and Armando
Manni's cacao and olive oil
sweets**

by **David Graver**
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Neither chocolate nor olive oil may be what immediately come to mind when considering the name Thomas Keller—the globally famous chef with three Michelin stars for his NYC restaurant Per Se. And yet, after yesterday's launch of K+M Extravirgin Chocolate Bars it's hard to separate Keller's vision from this exploratory yet precise project. Keller partnered with Armando Manni, a master olive oil maker and a favorite among renowned chefs. They founded the company in 2012 and Manni spent years researching the best chocolate-making techniques. Manni worked with the University of Florence to develop a chocolate

that replaced cocoa butter with Manni olive oil—for the sake of retaining antioxidants. Chocolatier Chi Bui was also brought into the fold to oversee bean-sourcing and production at the K+M facility in Napa, California. Three types of chocolate bars now exist, demarcated by their responsibly grown, single-origin source beans: Peru, Ecuador and Madagascar.

"This is something nobody has ever done before," Keller explained during the product launch this week. This is what motivated the desire to build their own chocolate factory. Bui helped to develop the roasting and grinding machines back in Italy, and five years into this process Keller was able to try a finished bar. "I'm surprised," he says, recalling that first time, "I'm surprised because it doesn't taste like any other chocolate that I've tasted before." He furthers this, paralleling the path of most chocolate consumers: "I grew up on Hershey bars. I graduated to maybe, I don't know, Cadbury to Godiva, to Lindt to Mast Brothers to Dandelion to Ritual. It [being this bar] didn't have reference points to chocolate that I was used to. It was something totally new to me. I realized after several weeks of continuously tasting it that the pure flavor of chocolate was what I was experiencing." Keller notes that each variety is very different—and we agree. Most notable of the three, the Ecuador, is so fresh and verdant that one truly recognizes the impact of the olive oil. The consistency of all three is quite silky and the melting point is one degree lower than that of our body, so flavor sets in and disperses quickly. Here, you can actually taste—or even experience—the difference.

Each bar—the 75% Madagascar, 75% Peru, and our personal favorite the 75% Ecuador can be purchased at Williams-Sonoma for \$15 each. True chocolate lovers can buy a box, which includes eight bars, straight from the K+M Extravirgin Chocolate for \$120.

Images courtesy of K+M