

BLACK

CARD

MAG

WINTER 2012

The Ultimate



Confection

A connoisseur's guide to the world's best chocolate.

by HILARY NANGLE

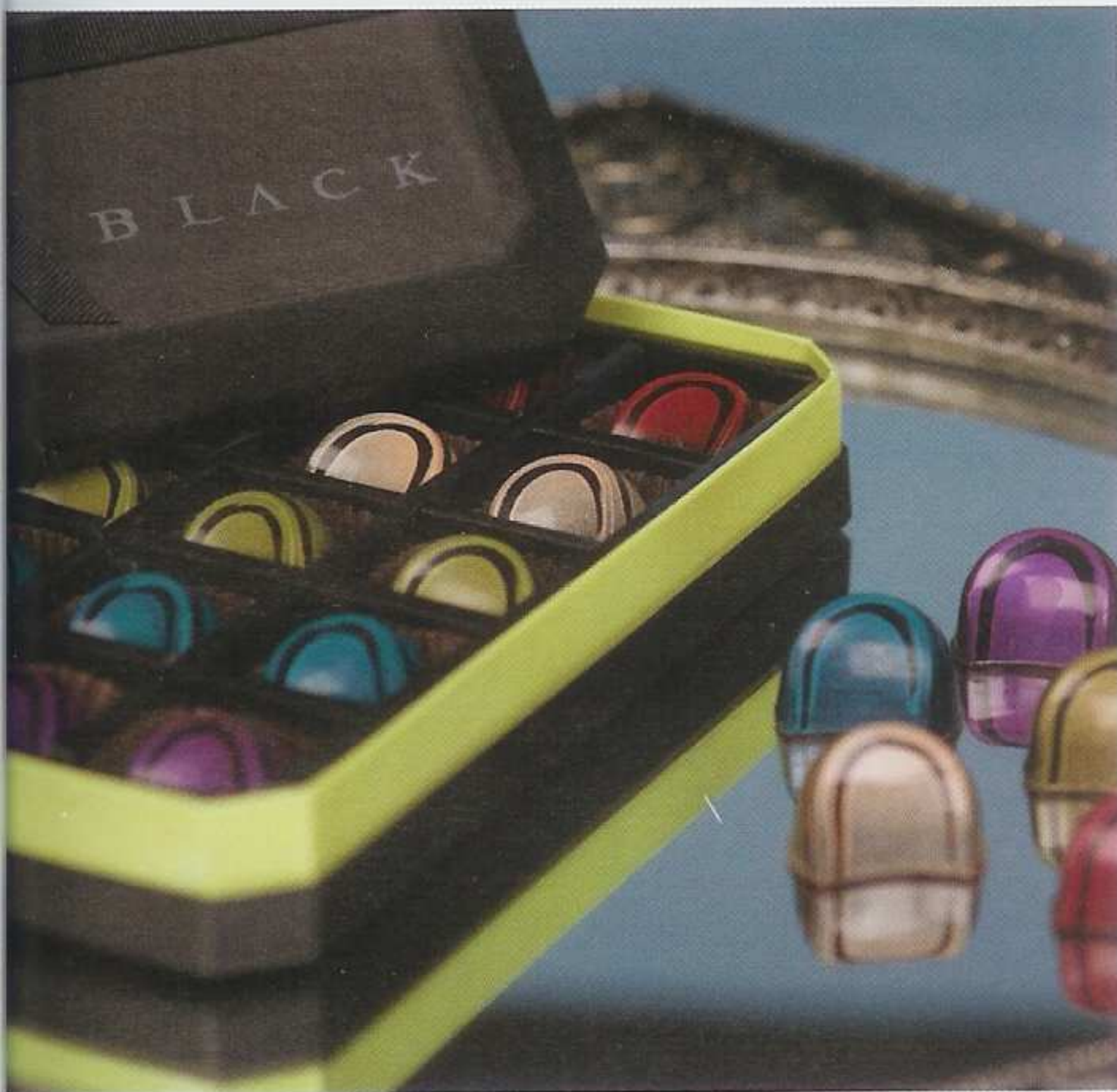
Fine, artisan-made chocolate is an object of passion and adoration, a sensuous, sublime treat that lifts the mind and resurrects the body. No wonder 18th-century Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus designated the cocoa tree *Theobroma cocoa*, or "Food of the Gods."

A decade or so ago, if you asked where to find the world's best chocolates, the answers likely would have been Switzerland, Belgium and France, with a few well-traveled souls giving the nod to Italy. That map is changing. We consulted with food and travel writers, chocolate experts and chefs and researched the rise of artisan chocolatiers to find the world's best chocolates and learn what elevates them to divine status.

Like wine and coffee aficionados, chocolate connoisseurs can discern distinct aromas and tastes. They discuss the importance of terroir, the

merits of cacao-growing regions and the flavor profiles of specific estates and beans. They also distinguish bean-to-bar chocolate makers who source, buy, roast and grind cocoa beans to make their own chocolate from chocolatiers who begin with couverture, chocolate made by others, but often to their specifications.

Experts agree that the best chocolates share six qualities. They appear glossy and evenly colored, without splotches or pitting; smell rich and clear, with distinctive scents such as floral, smoky and spicy; break with a snap, not a crumble; feel smooth and creamy in the mouth; taste neither too sweet nor too bitter, with complex yet balanced nuances emerging on the palate; and linger as a delicious memory. While individual palettes guide personal choice, these 10 chocolates earned universal praise. ▷



Norman Love Confections, UNITED STATES

Norman Love segued to chocolatier after a career as one of the country's top pastry chefs. His hand-made, preservative-free chocolates include truffles, along with bonbons in unusual flavors such as cookies 'n' cream, ginger lime and peanut butter banana, but his signature Black line flaunts his expertise. Each box contains single-origin dark chocolates from the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Bolivia, Venezuela and Madagascar, showcasing flavor differences between these regions.

normanloveconfections.com