

SOCIAL



This month Scarlet mixes her drinks with chocolate and heads to Hove for a hot date with Leonardo

THE SCARLET TASTE TEST

Five refined Scarlet palates sample chocolate-flavoured booze to see which tastes best – it's a tough job

1. Vermeer Dutch Chocolate Cream Liqueur

Lashings of pure Dutch chocolate go into making this vodka-based tippie, which inspired our panel. "It would be gorgeous poured over rich creamy vanilla ice-cream," said one. Another added it to coffee in place of milk and drank her way to instant heaven.

Score: 15/25

£13.89, thedrinkshop.com



2. Guylian Praliné Cream Liqueur

This after dinner drink is a bit nutty, in both senses of the word. The three-year aged Scotch whisky overpowers any chocolate aromas and the nut flavour seems at odds with the alcohol. You'll either love it or you'll hate it.

Score: 4/25

£15.49, drinkon.com



3. Rubis Fortified Wine Infused With Chocolate

On the nose this was likened to "the whoosh of chocolate when opening a box of Quality Street on Christmas morning" and voted "a red wine for women who don't like red." It's unexpectedly light and velvety, like Lindt in a glass – a clear winner.

Score: 22/25

£5.99, [Somerfield](http://Somerfield.com) and [Tesco](http://Tesco.com)



RESTAURANT REVIEW: Leonardo

★★★★☆

£: Starters from £3.95 to £14.95, main courses from £5.95 to £17.95, wine from £10.95 to £129 (for some swanky Dom Perignon).

Best dish: Capesante beconate in salsa allo zafferano (scallops with bacon in saffron sauce) – tender scallops served in the shell, complemented by bacon and a delicate creamy mushroom and saffron sauce. And forget about Atkins – the bread's to die for.

Best cocktail: There's no cocktail list, but they do a great Bailey's coffee.

Opening times: 12pm to 11.30pm Monday to Sunday.

Smoking policy: Smoking and non-smoking areas.

Perks: The pepper grinder has to be mentioned; coming in at over two feet long, it's likely to make your date feel a tad insecure. But the wall is packed with black and white pics of Italian stars such as Sophia Loren in her underwear, so that should cheer him up.

Leonardo, 55 Church Road, Hove, BN3 2DB, 01273 328 888, leonardo-restaurant.co.uk



What a dish!

BARROOM TOPIC: Are sex toys bad for your health?

A recent study by Greenpeace questioned the safety of sex toys – but is there really anything to worry about?

words: linda mccormick

WHAT'S THE FUSS?

In September last year Greenpeace published research highlighting the use of phthalates – chemicals used to make PVC more flexible (pronounced *thay-lates*) – in sex toys. The charity called for a global ban on their use (don't panic; that's the chemicals, not the sex toys), claiming that "exposure to these substances can upset the body's ability to regulate hormone production, damage reproduction, and cause liver and kidney defects. They can also possibly cause cancer." Understandably, this has caused a commotion among toy makers and users alike.

SHOULD I BIN MY RABBIT?

Well, it's not as bad as it sounds. To date there have been only a handful of studies carried out to investigate the effects of phthalates on children and animals, and the one study (by Greenpeace) investigating the use of phthalates in sex toys was based on only eight products – not exactly a global study. So it would be premature to throw out your Rabbit at this stage. It's also worth noting that the



use of phthalates and use none that are on their blacklist." Phew.

ARE THERE ALTERNATIVES?

Firstly, bear in mind the advice that anything you stick in an orifice would do well to have a condom on it. Failing that, choose sex toys made of quality materials like silicone, known for its durability and recyclability, or hypoallergenic and phthalate-free elastomer.

Phthalates are cheap and easy to use but the lack of government regulation in the adult toy industry means their use is difficult to control, and because many toys are labelled 'novelty', we rarely find out if potentially-damaging products have been added. Monique Carty from Sextoys.com says, "We understand PVC has been used for nearly 50 years without a single known case of it having caused any ill-health. However, for those who would prefer to use phthalate-free products, we now have a phthalate-free section on the site." Babeland.com and GoodVibes.com give full toy ingredients, and if you're looking for a green tinge to your afterglow, you can get sustainable

"All our products are tested to ensure they're non-toxic by the same standard implemented for children's toys. We're very aware of the European Commission's stance on the use of phthalates and use none that are on their blacklist" – Vanessa Gold, Ann Summers

amount of time a sex toy spends in your body is minimal (we hope) compared to how long perfume or cosmetics – some of which also contain phthalates – stay on your skin.

In fact, phthalates are present in many everyday products, such as ink, paint and vinyl flooring, without much complaint. The largest proportion (85 to 90 percent) comes from meat and fish. The substance *has* been banned in children's

toys since 2005, but this makes sense as toddlers tend to shove anything and everything in their gobs.

As you might expect, the sex toy sellers themselves are anxious to reassure you their toys are safe. Vanessa Gold from Ann Summers says, "All our products are tested to ensure they're non-toxic by the same standard implemented for children's toys. We're very aware of the European Commission's stance on the

naughty things to play with from environmental site Treehugger.com.

Using sex toys is generally a very safe affair – depending on what you do with them, obviously – but it's sensible practice to be aware of what you're buying, and shop at reputable stores. At *Scarlet* we also feel that it's up to those who promote the use of sex toys to ensure people are educated consumers – hence this article. Happy shopping. 🍷