

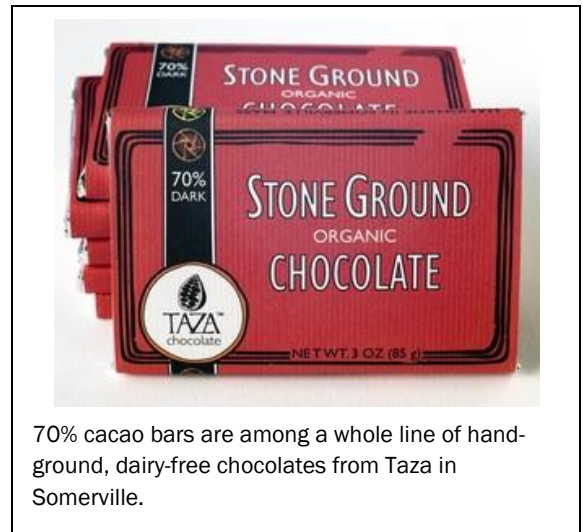
Local dairy-free hero: Taza Chocolate

By Holly Rossi
July 13, 2010
Examiner.com

Looking for decadent—and dairy-free—artisan chocolates? Look no farther than Somerville, where [Taza Chocolate](#) not only crafts a non-dairy treat, it does so using the unique method of small-batch stone-grinding.

Taza chocolate bars (\$6.50 for a 3-oz bar) contain a grand total of 4 ingredients:

- **Cacao beans** - Most of the beans are grown (sustainably) in the Dominican Republic, though some are grown in Chiapas, Mexico, Bolivia, and Belize. Because the chocolate is stone-ground, bits of the beans remain in the bars, but they melt in your mouth as you enjoy.
- **Cane sugar** - Taza sources its sugar from [The Green Cane Project](#), a Brazilian company that powers itself using fibers left over from creating their organic cane sugar. Cane sugar is minimally-processed, when compared to regular granulated sugar, and it lends a deep sweetness to products flavored with it.
- **Cocoa butter** - Don't panic, the "butter" in "cocoa butter" merely refers to the fact that it's a fat—there's no animal dairy involved. Cocoa butter is extracted from the cacao beans, and it's what allows the finished chocolate to remain solid at room temperature and to melt smoothly on your tongue.
- **Whole vanilla beans** - Taza uses organic vanilla beans from a Costa Rican company called [Villa Vanilla](#). Though often imagined as "either-or" flavors (think of how kids tend to prefer vanilla or chocolate ice cream), vanilla bean's soft, rich flavor actually enhances chocolate's natural depth and complexity.



70% cacao bars are among a whole line of hand-ground, dairy-free chocolates from Taza in Somerville.

Artisan chocolate can be an acquired taste—younger palettes will prefer the 60% cacao bar because it's sweeter than the bars that contain more of the complex—but slightly bitter—cacao. Also worth trying are the round, "Mexican-style discs" (\$4.50 for 2.7 oz, contains 2 discs) that are flavored with aromatics like pungent, powerful cinnamon or crunchy, savory salted almond. And for you bakers, Taza has a baking line that includes baking squares and chocolate extract.

Taza chocolate boasts many health benefits, not only because of what it lacks (dairy, soy, and gluten), but also because of what it contains. Taza's minimally processed cacao retains some magical healthful compounds, from magnesium, iron, potassium, vitamin E, and calcium, to high levels of antioxidants called flavonols, which help slow or even stop cell damage.

You can find Taza chocolates at several area farmer's markets (Arlington, Belmont, and Kendall Square among them), in specialty food shops (I purchased my samples at [Giles Fine Wine](#) in East Arlington; they are also available at Whole Foods Markets), or through [Taza's online store](#).