

GUANAJA

40 YEARS OF EXPLORING CHOCOLATE



VALRHONA

VALRHONA IS CELEBRATING
ITS ICONIC CHOCOLATE'S ANNIVERSARY



Forty years ago, an audacious new creation sparked a revolution in dark chocolate. With Guanaja 70%, Valrhona broke new grounds for chocolate that was more intense, more technical and more demanding. Forty years later, this iconic product continues to inspire professionals and embody the pioneering spirit behind Valrhona.

In 2026, Valrhona celebrates not a static past, but a living, evolving legacy. It belongs to a chocolate that has transformed practice, set all-new standards for quality, and pushed back the boundaries of flavor by introducing connoisseurs' palates to a carefully controlled bitterness that has become a benchmark in the industry.



GUANAJA: THE EMBODIMENT OF VALRHONA'S EXPERTISE

Guanaja's story begins in Tain-l'Hermitage, in the heart of the Rhône Valley. Antoine Dodet, then Valrhona's visionary managing director, set an unprecedented challenge for his teams: **to create a dark chocolate with a level of intensity never achieved before, boldly displaying a 70% cocoa content on its label, an absolute revolution at the time.**

Such an ambition demanded **a complete reinvention of the creative process.**

A methodical approach to sensory analysis started to take root at Valrhona. **Just as a perfumer's nose composes a fragrance, Valrhona blends its fine cocoas.** Guanaja was designed as **an aromatic blend**, as opposed to a simple combination of origins. It brought together five, sometimes six, cocoas from South America, the Caribbean and Africa selected for their complementary spicy, fruity, bitter, tangy, vanilla-inflected, or roasted characteristics. Each batch of **beans is meticulously selected by Valrhona's sourcing professionals**, who forge direct, long-term relationships with producers. The batches are then blind-tasted by experts to assess their potential and guide the creation of **a complex, well balanced and instantly recognizable blend**. It is this approach, shaped by passion and the highest standards, which fashioned **a "signature" flavor of rare complexity.**

Guanaja's creation was about more than just selecting the finest cocoa beans, however, as **every stage in its making was reimagined with the utmost precision.** New machinery, roasting tailored to each origin, fine-tuned temperature charts, and extended conching all emerged as part of the process, along with the increased cocoa content. This **technical revolution** uncovered a unique aromatic profile.

In 1986, after months of trials, a new kind of chocolate came into being, one which was intense, bitter and robust yet subtle, lingering on the palate like none before. This new chocolate—the most powerful of its era—opened a hitherto unexplored creative horizon. **A name worthy of the discovery was needed.** It was to be Guanaja, a word blown in from a faraway, windswept island in Honduras where Christopher Columbus is said to have tasted cocoa for the first time.

« Guanaja is an iconic product inextricably intertwined with Valrhona's history. It expresses the very essence of our identity and blending expertise, that ability to strike the perfect balance across different origins. »

Martine Grazioso, Valrhona's managing director.

A CHOCOLATE THAT CHANGED EVERYTHING

When it came out, Guanaja was as disruptive as it was fascinating, **shaking up the conventions professionals had lived by up to then.**

At the time, many had to **relearn how to work with their chocolate**, adapt their recipes and explore new balances between ingredients. With a flavor revolution underway, Valrhona made a defining choice to **support professionals** so that they could entirely master the product's new expressive potentiality. It was with this in mind that **L'École Valrhona was created and has since become a leading international training center** for makers and chefs from around the world. It was the desire to offer guidance—and **the determination of Frédéric Bau—which brought The Essentials into being.** This compendium of basic recipes quantified for every Valrhona chocolate has become a key tool for makers and restaurateurs the world over.

This singular chocolate quickly became a **unique playground for exploring ideas** in schools, competitions and kitchens. Forty years later, **Guanaja is still inspiring chefs around the globe.** It is a real **ingredient of choice for creators**, as its structure and intensity **open up new creative possibilities** (including contrasts, textures, carefully controlled levels of bitterness, and aromatic nuances), as well as making it **an all-important ally for professionals** looking for unexplored culinary grounds.

Guanaja introduced **a new language**: one which spoke of cocoa contents, bitterness, aromatic strength, and balance. This more precise, almost scientific, approach was seized upon first by professionals, then the wider public. The iconic box of 18 squares, launched in 1986, **introduced the public to a bitterness they had never experienced before and an aromatic complexity that overturned all their preconceptions**, building a bridge between haute cuisine and passionate amateurs.

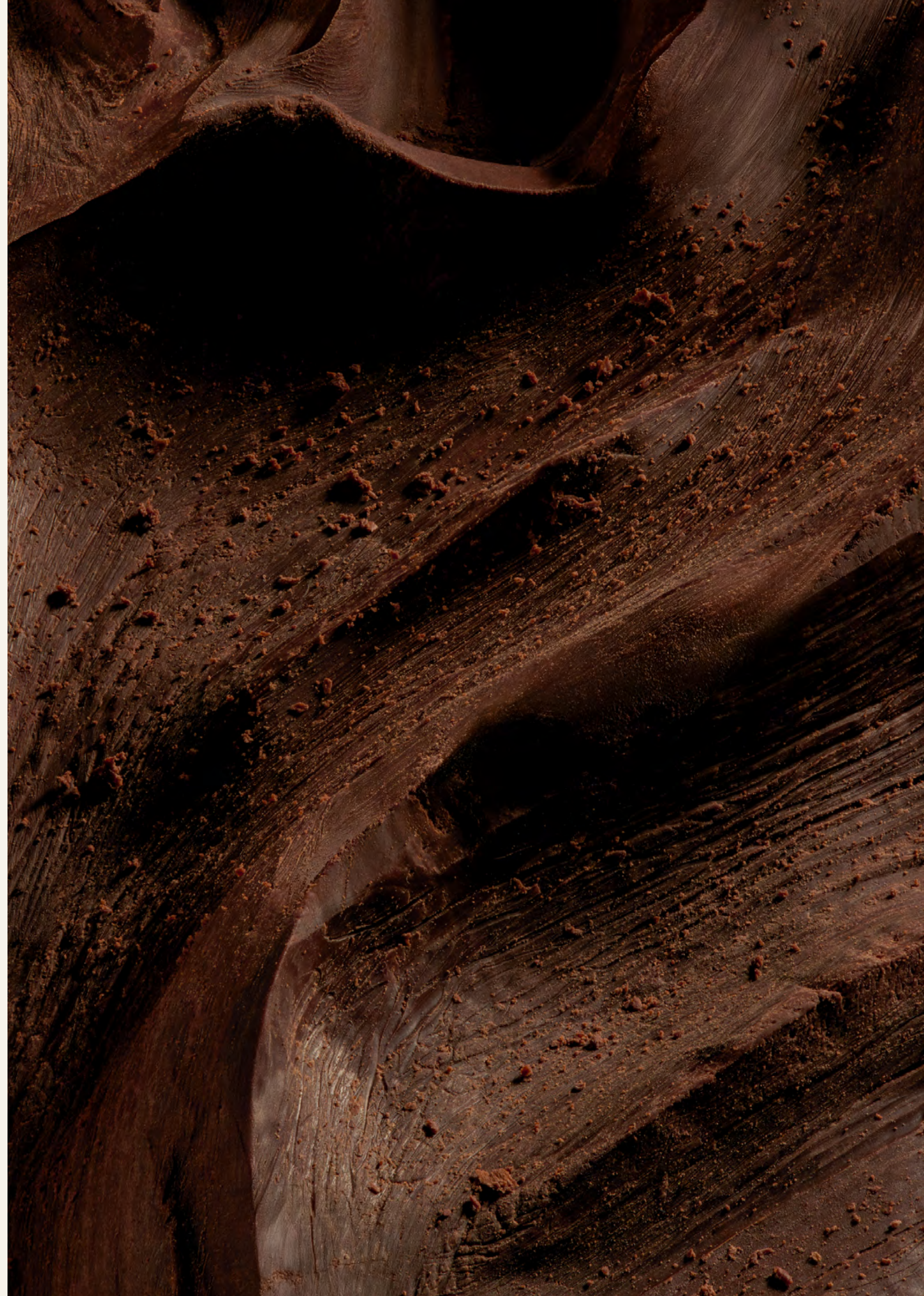
Guanaja had not just transformed flavor, it had helped to push forward technique, set out how knowledge could be shared and open a new creative world.





AN ARTWORK TO CELEBRATE 40 YEARS OF AUDACITY

To mark its anniversary, Valrhona is paying tribute to this icon through a **sculptural creation made of Guanaja chocolate**, designed as an untamed landscape, a metaphor for its power and complexity. This **signature was dreamed up by David Briand**, Meilleur Ouvrier de France in pastry and confectionery and executive pastry chef at L'École Valrhona, who was himself also born in 1986. The material expresses itself without artifice in its use of relief, strata and textures. It is a sincere celebration of chocolate in its truest form.





GUANAJA: THE TASTE OF THE UNEXPECTED

For forty years, Guanaja has been pushing the boundaries of flavor, driven by the bold spirit of exploration, experimentation and uncompromising creation that defines true pioneers. It has redefined dark chocolate's standards, supported generations of professionals and fueled creators' imaginations.

It remains to this day symbolic of audacity and high standards. And **it will keep opening new creative avenues for years to come.** Guanaja has never stopped evolving alongside those who work with it. Its story doesn't end with this anniversary, not least because there are new textures to invent, aromatic pairings to dream up and creative worlds to explore. **With Guanaja, the exploration continues.**





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