



No.1 UK coffee chain (Bev-e awards, 2009)

Boughton's COFFEE HOUSE

Mar/Apr 2010



How the barista championships panned out, with Max - page 4

First Choice takes on WBC machine

In a move which took the coffee machine sector completely by surprise, First Choice Coffee has taken on the exclusive UK distributorship of Nuova Simonelli espresso machines, including the one which will be used in this year's World Barista Championship. Coffeetech, the UK distributors up to now, will work with First Choice, probably contributing their vast experience in the servicing of the complex machines.

Elaine Higginson, managing director of First Choice, has said that the move reinforces her company's status as the leading supplier of espresso machines to the hospitality industry.

First Choice, which already supplies many of the giant catering names, is now in the extremely powerful position of being able to supply espresso machines in all the formats and levels which the hospitality industry requires, from acknowledged top brands and manufacturers.

"Our proposition before was in bean-to-cup from medium to very high end, and in traditional espresso at the very high end. We had a gap in our traditional range, and we also had a gap in very low-volume bean-to-cup.



Elaine Higginson

"We now have a complete range of espresso machines - everything from a baby one-group to the very high end, and everything from bean-to-cup, to the traditional, automatic and super-auto. It's the tiered offer which we need to be seen as a true leader."

Her company now has the Nuova Simonelli Aurelia, the machine which has the distinction of being chosen for use in the World Barista Championship finals. First Choice says it will seize this opportunity to enthuse both trade and public about speciality coffee and about what a top-class machine can do.

"We will be putting together a plan to involve everyone - we really are going to use this to promote the cause of good coffee in the UK."

Aussie John Gordon to brew for Britain!



John Gordon of Gorilla Tampers, an Australian, will represent the UK in the first-ever world barista championship finals to be held in this country. John, pictured in competition action above, took the British title at the Hotelympia show on 1st March. John swept the board, also winning best espresso, best cappuccino, and best signature drink. Second place went to Dale Harris of First Choice, and in third was Neil le Bihan of Exchange Coffee. The world final will be at the Caffe Culture show in London, in June.

Pic: courtesy of SCAE



Banksy and Suki

It's very nice to see a unique and imaginative piece of artwork in support of a tea. This item is a tribute to Banksy, the graffiti artist who has never been identified. He was featured in the press a few months ago because of his exhibition at the Bristol Museum, and was widely quoted as saying he chose the venue 'because they do a very nice cup of tea'. The tea served there is Suki, whose founder Oscar Woolley is a former illustrator, and produced this artwork as a result.

Our tea feature starts on page 8

Salvoni's new coffee trade pressure group

The man who once formed an activist group to campaign on behalf of the speciality coffee trade is doing it again. Louie Salvoni, head of Espresso Service and former importer of Brasilia espresso machines, has formed the Coffee Council, a collection of people in the trade who are prepared to speak out and lobby on behalf of the cafe industry.

Salvoni is a London-Italian coffee specialist who has for many years been a man the newspapers have readily turned to for a quote on matters relating to coffee.

He now believes there is a need for a body to speak up on the importance of standards within the trade, and also to promote those standards outside the trade. He expects to campaign on issues ranging from matters of beverage quality to planning problems between café owners and local authorities, and safety issues inside cafes.

"This is all about highlighting quality," he told *Coffee House*. "An example is the current problem with the quality of flat white - it's very reminiscent of an old campaign we once held for 'real coffee'. That started as a reaction against soluble 'cappuccino' being passed off for the real thing, and here we go again... soon we're going to need a campaign for a real flat white!"

Promoting the quality of the independent coffee-house trade is important, he says. "When Starbucks and Costa first came out, they were seen

as the very top. Now things are being pushed from the bottom, by the independents. A good analogy is the cappuccino, in which the most important quality, the coffee, is the smaller ingredient at the base!

"The café chains are no longer setting the quality bar - they're chasing it."

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The local press in Bournemouth pointed a sign of the times in reporting that the Del Marco café was closing after ten years. The site landlord said the site would be turned into an "exciting, national fashion retailer, which would be a boost to the town centre". Heaven help us...

Urban Coffee, a café in Birmingham's Colmore business district, has made an interesting move to distinguish itself from other local cafes - it has taken on a couple of craft beers from Purity, a brewing company just south of the city. Urban Coffee has also been shortlisted for the Customer Kings award.

A café on the platform of Enfield Chase train station has made the finals of a European business competition. Karen Mercer and Gunter Hollenstein of My Coffee Stop are in the Linked In awards, run by an online networking organisation. The café is an all-Fairtrade business, using Cafe Prima beans by Garraways.

We regret to report the passing of Mr Emilio Lavazza, the honorary president of the Italian coffee brand, and father of Giuseppe and Francesca, current directors of the company. Dr. Emilio Lavazza joined the family company in 1955, was responsible for turning Lavazza into a brand sold

throughout Italy, and was largely responsible for beginning the world-famous classy marketing programmes for which the brand is still known.

Greggs, the Tyneside café chain with a big coffee interest, is proposing 60 new shops this year, beginning a programme which aims to take it from 1,400 shops to over two thousand.

The Trieste Espresso Expo is set for 28-30 October this year. Trieste is a noted coffee trading region in Italy, and two million sacks of imported coffee arrive there each year.

Moran Beverage Services of Middlesbrough is launching Caffe Vinci, which the company says has involved two years' development, and an investment of £250,000. It is, we believe, roasted in Italy.

The Association of Independent Espresso Engineers (AIEE) held its first national meeting at Xpress Coffee Commercial's base in Milton Keynes with over 20 independent engineers attending. It was decided unanimously that any member found not adhering to their agreed code of conduct will forfeit their place within the organisation.

Starbucks is to use a gluten-free bread for some sandwiches from mid-February. It is using Genius, a bread from United Central Bakeries.

High street sites still plentiful

There is still plenty of room on the high street for those who wish to live the cafe dream, and also for those who want to industrialise it. High-street vacancies continue to rise, says the Local Data Company in its End of Year report. The company surveyed 149,000 shop premises in 700 town centres in the UK, and says that while there are signs of improvement in some centres, "overall the vacancy trend remains doggedly upwards."

Town centre vacancy rates rose from nearly 10 per cent in the middle of 2009 to over 12 per cent by the end of the year. The big city centres of the midlands and north continue to show extremely high numbers of empty shops.

Wolverhampton is the worst town for vacancies, followed by Bradford, Sheffield and Middlesbrough.

However, some centres have improved - Birmingham's vacant shop numbers have improved to around 10 per cent, Leicester has made a slight

improvement to 12 per cent empty sites, and Exeter had improved two per cent to 13 per cent vacancy.

In medium-sized towns, Margate tops the vacancy rate list, followed by Gateshead, Stockport, Camberley and Letchworth.

The second Starbucks store under the new 'local' design concept is in South Kensington, London. It is thought to be paying around £100,000 a year for the store. Starbucks is also reported to have taken a south London site in Brixton Road at £110,000.

Big brands attempt to catch up with online social networks

Big brands are continuing to take an interest in 'social networking' on the internet. When Starbucks' boss Howard Schultz was in London recently, he said that he wants to become a leader in 'digital space', already claiming five million followers on Facebook. And Kraft Foods has proposed a digital strategy for Mellow Bird's, as it launches its first social media campaign. Bizarrely, the multinational giant is reported to be attempting an 'anti-corporate feeling', and to be targeting students with a Facebook computer game which links in with Twitter.

Not all brands have had happy experiences with the concept.

The trade paper for PR agencies reports that Nestle is looking for an agency to handle 'an emergency online PR campaign to restore its reputation amid sustained criticism on the internet'.

Part of this comes from a problem last year when Nestle invited 20 influential 'mummy bloggers' to its American headquarters to recruit their support; there was apparently a big backlash on the 'social networking' sites.

Mummy-bloggers are a self-descriptive network, and last summer were thought to number 500 in the UK and 6,000 in the States; big brands were quick to realise the opportunities for product-placement and product review among this network, and many mummy-bloggers report dozens of approaches from big brands, looking for their products to be written about.

And giant brands are not entirely popular within social networks.

According to Yomogo, an organisation which tracks social media appearances, Nestle received a 'positivity' score of only 12 per cent across social networking - Kraft scored 32.

At the same time, the ICM survey organization has reported that although marketing expenditure on social media is expected to reach £1.9 billion by 2014, sixty per cent of marketers have no current social media strategy.

Even so eighty-eight per cent of them do believe that social media activity can affect brand reputation, 79 per cent think that engaging in social media will help increase customers and 71 per cent see a direct correlation between social media activity and future market share.

Surprisingly, only 24 per cent of respondents felt that social media has any relevance to customer service, despite well-publicised cases of complaints against certain companies reaching millions of online 'hits' and viewings.



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Peros and Allegra get to work for growing communities

Two well-known trade companies have begun projects for humanitarian aid to coffee-growing communities. One project is to help farmers who are important suppliers to the Cafedirect brand, and the other aims to raise money through a voluntary coffee surcharge.

Peros, the biggest supplier of Fairtrade beverages to foodservice, has started a fund to send help to Peru, where forty thousand people in the coffee-growing areas have been badly hit by floods and landslides. Emergency aid is desperately required, but the disaster has not been widely publicised in the news.

"This region of Peru has supplied coffee to Cafedirect for more than ten years," Peros tells us. "It is difficult to measure exactly how many people have now been directly and indirectly affected by the recent disaster. It has been quoted in local news that up to 10,000 people have lost their homes."

Peros has launched its appeal with a five-figure donation, and has set up

the Peros Cusco Emergency Appeal to receive donations directly.

Allegra, the trade's survey company, has launched Project Waterfall, to provide clean drinking water and education to poor communities in African coffee-producing countries.

The proposed idea is to collect voluntary 5p-per-cup contributions at the tills of all chain and independent coffee venues throughout the UK.

The contributions are to be collected at a project called UK Coffee Week, in September, and the target in the first year, is to raise more than £1m to provide safe drinking water for up to 100,000 growers who do not currently have access to it.

Managing progress in the coffee trade

Two of this year's talking shops will be looking at the future of coffee in various market sectors.

The first will be the Allegra Summit, on 21-22 April at Vinopolis in London. The topic 'the future of the market - place' will be discussed by Starbucks, Caffe Nero and another chain yet to be named, while the topic 'broadening the role of coffee in foodservice' will be addressed by speakers from Marks and Spencer, Le Pain Quotidien and Coffee Nation. Several independent operators, including Square Mile roasters, Taylor St Baristas, Espresso Service and Coffee Community, will talk about their work and there will be an ethical discussion which we expect to be notable for again featuring Dr Peter Griffiths, the man who attacked Fairtrade at the last summit.

Later in the year, the three-day SCAE programme at Caffe Culture also looks at the future, in various ways. On the first day, 'Managing Change Management' ranges from

dealing with changing consumer demands through to the fallout of the current worldwide economic crisis. Speakers are Buck Hendrix of Starbucks; Doug Zell of Intelligensia Coffee, Jeff Grouts of JM Consulting, Paul Ettinger of Caffe Nero, and someone from Costa Coffee.

The second day is entitled 'A Whole New World', and looks at where the industry is going next.

Speakers are Richard Barclay, senior international man at the SSP Group, Kenneth Lucciani of Baresso Coffee in Denmark, Marco Schalf of Schalf Group in Vienna, and James Hoffmann of Square Mile, the London roasters.

The third day is given over to the evolution of the café-bar concept. The star here is David Schomer, from Espresso Vivace in Seattle.

Beacon, the largest purchasing consortium in the hospitality trade, has presented two of its annual prizes to Brodies, the Edinburgh coffee roaster and tea supplier. The company got the 'outstanding customer service' award for the second year in succession, and the company's Ian Hannah won an award for 'most exceptional staff member' of a supplier company.

Tim Wendelboe, the Norwegian who was world barista champion in 2004, has logged the drinks he sold in January, and it's an interesting analysis - top of the list at 23.3 per cent of total sales were filter coffees made through the Clover machine. Espresso shots tied with lattes at 21 per cent, and cappuccinos followed closely.

Esquires coffee houses is to open ten stores during this year, and the property press has speculated on more 'unique and less conventional sites'. This, MD Peter Kirton told us, may include drive-thru sites, motorway locations, and sites within museums and libraries.

Huhtamaki has won a 'supplier of the year' award from Bunzl, the distributor of catering disposables. It is Huhtamaki's 90th year in business.

Starbucks is to work with Arla, the milk company which is a sponsor of

the UKBC under its Cravendale brand, to create ready-to-drink coffee products for the European market.

Essential Trading, the vegan and vegetarian specialist, has come up with a new 'cause' coffee, and the tag 'the most ethical cup of coffee you will find'. Café Rebelde Zapatista is grown by Chiapas communities in Mexico. The Zapatistas are a group of autonomous indigenous people in southern Mexico who have reclaimed 50,000 hectares of land, to win an alternative life to being slum-dwelling city labourers. The communities have created their own autonomous government system, health, education, water and food production infrastructure. Funds from the sale of Café Rebelde Zapatista are used directly for fresh water projects. Beans are in boxes of ten 500gm packs.

The first drive-through coffee bar in the Midlands is to be converted from a structure that used to be a car-wash. It is in Lockhurst Lane, Coventry.

Starbucks is to take over the cafe business in 29 motorway service stations run by the Welcome Break chain. They replace the chain's own Cafe Primo outlets. The first two are due to open at Oxford Services (M40) and Hopwood Park (M42) before Easter.

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...since First Choice Coffee has installed a traditional coffee machine and turned us into coffee connoisseurs,"

Dominic Wood, owner of the Wild Wood in Bristol.

"The phenomenal success we've had is largely down to the training we've received from First Choice Coffee. The key for me is the uniformity in the preparation and the way the coffee is served. Every cup has the wow factor and I think that sets people's minds up for an enjoyable experience before they even taste it," continues Dominic.

For more information on how First Choice Coffee can help you boost your hot beverage business, call Tracey on 01908 275 555.

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It had been said – indeed, we said it ourselves! – that this year's UK barista championship had always looked to be a very promising run-up to the world championships, which will of course be held in London this year.

As it turned out, the annual contest did again show high standards, which is encouraging for our chances against the rest of the world, and of course of retaining the world title.

Every heat was, quite genuinely, closely contested, and the progressive 'leader board' very quickly began to show scores in the upper 500s, which is always a good sign. And then, in the last two regional heats, the lead changed so rapidly that at one point, this magazine's online report was criticised for having got the scores wrong – in fact, we were right, but it showed just how rapidly things moved.

It was in the third heat, the North and Midlands where the pace really began to increase, when Will Corby took the lead in the table, with a score eighteen points above the previous heat winner and broke through the 600 mark. In one of the geographical curiosities which crops up so frequently in the UKBC, Will is not from the area at all, but had travelled from south Wales, where he trains for Black Mountains Coffee, and also runs a coffee cart in a market.

Will had been in competition only a few months previously, when he came third in the Caffe Society Brasilia-branded contest, beaten by Howard Barwick, a Costa franchisee, and Hannah Davies of Brodericks. This time he got his revenge, by beating both of them in the UKBC heat. This was a decisive victory - he took first place overall, was judged to have made the best espresso, and the best signature drink, and was joint winner of the best cappuccino.

Market-stall baristas score high again!

"Since Gwilym Davies won the world title from a market stall last year, you now have to run a coffee cart to be taken seriously as a craft barista..."



Neil Le Bihan (above) and Will Corby (right), two regional champs who spend their working days at market stalls. Note Will's use of coffee sacks as table covering!



Will's signature drink was a 'liquid pancake', a judge told us, with corn-flour and icing sugar and egg yolk, warmed, with espresso on the top. His espresso was Nicaraguan Finca San Jose, a micro-lot from Los Escondita (the little hiding place) with a bit of Ethiopian.

Will told us that his third place in the Brasilia contest had been down to the espresso-blending part of the competition, where he performed badly, and was unable to make it up on his barista work.

"I do run a coffee cart," he told us, "but I only started it last year as an

opportunity to taste more coffee and practice for competition!"

Second-placed in the northern heat was Carl Fleischer of the Opposite café (a venue well known in competition) and Gordon Howell of the Cafe Harlequin came third - both qualified for the semi-finals.

It was in the last heat, in London, where the scores really changed - Will was suddenly overtaken by Neil Le Bihan of Exchange Coffee in Lewisham Market, James Phillips of the well-regarded Dose coffee bar in Smithfield Market, and Dale Harris of First Choice Coffee. (And this heat was so high-scoring that Dale, in third place, actually scored higher than the winners of the other regional heats!)

Neil arrived in London as an existing SCAE winner - a couple of weeks previously he had taken the British latte art title, beating into third place Lynsey Harley of Drury, who is also his business partner in the Lewisham coffee cart. (As one of the long-standing judges acknowledged wryly - since Gwilym Davies won the world title from a market stall last year, you now have to run a coffee cart to be taken seriously as a craft barista!)

Neil's signature drink was a Peruvian espresso matched with a Peruvian dark chocolate, with lemongrass-infused palm sugar syrup.

James Phillips created a signature drink of grapefruit syrup and an infu-

sion of juniper berries, shaken over ice and served in a martini glass.

Dale Harris was using a single estate Nicaraguan Cup of Excellence coffee, and for his signature drink he too used Peruvian chocolate, but with cream and Brayburn apples.

"The coffee was from the La Piconia farm in Nicaragua," Dale told us. "For my cappuccinos and signature drink I used milk and cream from Rookery Farm in Mark, Somerset, the village where my wife grew up. Colin Petheram has 100 cows, produces great milk and really cares about what he does - it makes sense to me to put the level of traceability and provenance we care about so much in the coffee world to all the ingredients we use."

In the south west, Jose Melium was one of three entrants from Jika Jika, the relatively new coffee shop in Bath which has the backing of some rugby internationalists. Jose came through over Trevor Hyam of the Plan Café (another entrant from previous years) and Nancy Scott of Coffee #1 in third.

His signature drink was of Nicaraguan coffee, with an infusion of dried coffee cherries, molasses, a little spice and Venezuelan cocoa.

The success of Nancy Scott getting through to the final stages was matched by her Coffee #1 colleague Liina Nutman, leading the chain's boss James Shapland to observe that

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together with Estelle Bright of Kaffeine, who reached the finals through the London heat and is a former member of his team, that his company was this year's breeding-ground for champion baristas!

There was another interesting aside to Liina's success - Mat North of Clifton Coffee, supporters of the Coffee 1# entrants, noted that her coffee was a decaf. This, he suggested, was the first time an entrant using decaffeinated espresso had won through to the semi-finals.

"It was roasted by Masteroast, who supply both ourselves and Coffee #1. It is Swiss Water processed and consists of 40 per cent natural Brazilian, 50 per cent washed Costa Rican, and ten per cent Sumatran Mandhaling."

The Scottish regional event had made what appeared to be an early declaration of strong intent - Jonathan Sharp of Kilimanjaro, a finalist in last year's competition, made a signature drink which won the highest marks of the day. It involved orange peel, cream, treacle and chocolate along with his espresso.

Runner up was Megan Barker from Artisan, a roaster-retailer café in Edinburgh which has made a name for itself very quickly. Megan won the top score for her straight espresso, which must have been particularly satisfying as she roasts it herself, blending a Brazilian Yellow Bourbon with Sumatra Mandhaling. The blend is known as Larry - because, explained a colleague at Artisan, "it makes her as happy as...!"

Her signature drink was a macchiato with lime zest and white chocolate with a high cocoa-butter content.

Third place in Scotland was taken by Ryan McHugh of the Grind House in Edinburgh.

"My signature drink was a white chocolate and macadamia nut espresso," he told us, "where I roasted the macadamia nuts and crushed them using a mortar and pestle to almost a crunchy puree and added them to the melted white chocolate. I then put this mixture in the bottom of my glass and layered the espresso on top."

Despite what had seemed a high-scoring third place in the Scottish heat, Ryan's score was not enough to get him through to the semi-finals.

As always, some curiosities cropped up everywhere. One contestant drove 200 miles to her regional heat, to find that the local water was considerably different to that at home, for which she had roasted her coffee. It didn't perform at all. Just before her presentation, she discovered a three-week old bag of coffee in her car, and switched to that - it worked perfectly!

Buston's powerful coffee martini takes the Good Spirits prize

As had been expected, some remarkable creativity was shown in the three other SCAE contests recently held.

The latte art contest always comes up with something unexpected. The format requires an entrant to have a photograph of the proposed design, and then pour as close to that as they possibly can - this is to safeguard against the entertaining possibility that someone may, by sheer luck or an unintended shake of the jug, produce a brilliant design by accident.

It was Neil Le Bihan who won with a triple rosetta, and who also achieved what the judges described as 'a hanging tulip, a swirling rosetta ending in a three leaf tulip'.

Second place was won by something probably never seen before - latte art in group handles. It was achieved by Marcin Drzewiecki of Elior UK, in what one of the organisers called 'a high-risk strategy' pour!

Third was Lynsey Harley of Drury.

The Coffee in Good Spirits contest, the only one in which alcohol is allowed, was won by Ed Buston of Clifton Coffee, a noted competitor in several events over the years. He created the Martini Potento, a powerful item and yet, he stressed, one that could be made up entirely of items which can be found behind a standard cocktail bar.

"I started with a half-shot triple sec, an orange-flavoured liqueur. On top of that was a double ristretto shaken with Tuaca vanilla liqueur - nice and spicy.

"I layered that with double cream mixed with a half-shot of Frangelico hazelnut liqueur and a little almond liqueur. Then I topped it with 100-per cent Peruvian cocoa, and the zest of an orange, which I set on fire as I squirted it!

"The first and last things you taste are orange, but not too much - orange can take over a drink if you're not careful. In the middle was a dessert-like nutty coffee. It sounds strong... but really, there's only two shots of alcohol in there."

Can the drink be a practical menu item? Ed Buston suggests that it can, but that because it takes a couple of minutes to make, it would be best promoted as a very special cocktail dessert item, ideally offered in pairs for a couple, thus allowing the economy of two drinks being made at the same time. The selling price can be as high as a server dares pitch it.

Second place was taken by Richard



Buston's martini, Le Bihan's latte art, and Drzewiecki's astonishing group-handle pours.



Teasdale of Coffee Aroma, Lincoln, and third by Victor Frankowski of Union Hand Roasted, London.

The UK Cup Tasting Championship, in which tasters have to distinguish the flavours of many top quality coffees and identify the odd one out in what are called 'triangle tests' was won by Paul Stephens of Redroaster in Brighton. Second was Jose Aguilar of

the importer Mercanta, and third was David Faulkner of Extract Coffee, Bristol. First and third, said the organisers, just show the current quality of our gourmet artisan roasters.

We are obliged to Paul Meikle-Janney of Coffee Community for a vast amount of back-up data and photographs

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One of the most baffling primal instincts of the human race, a basic drive which exists in the midst of both good times and the deepest recession, is the unstoppable urge to open a coffee-house or tea room.

It follows that an equally big urge is the one on the part of publishers to bring out 'how-to' books on the subject of entering the hospitality trade. Whole libraries have been written on the subject, and very few of them win the approval of the trade – there have indeed been some which contain 'advice' so dangerous that we have refused to review them.

A couple of years ago, John Richardson and Hugh Gilmartin, who also go under the public-speaking double-act title of The Coffee Boys, produced an entirely new kind of consultancy work which attracted not only newcomers to the trade, but existing cafe owners, because of the originality of their approach. Instead of just telling the reader what to do, they illustrated what they said by true stories, from their own background in the trade – and not just the successful bits which showed how clever they had been. The Coffee Boys went into equally great detail about the times they completely lost their shirts, and why.

And in the latest book, the two manage to pull off, yet again, the delicate balancing act between encouraging the reader to success in the cafe business, without whitewashing the dangers.

Typically, within very few pages of this book, we meet the good sides and the bad sides of the trade – what the Boys have to say about landlords, solicitors, and quite certainly coffee equipment suppliers, would be enough to turn anyone away from the Dream, were it not that they immediately show the happy side of the business. "Coffee bars," they write, "are the most most pleasant part of the hospitality business - and also the easiest for attracting decent staff." (Gerry Ford of Caffe Nero once made exactly the same point, observing that he won a lot of really good staff from the pub trade, because they loved not having to deal with drunks).

However, the Boys do also start with some unexpected harsh advice. Part of the very first training, they say, is to pay a visit to the local bankruptcy courts. While the legal people are chatting about their holidays and new cars, look at the people 'whose dreams have been shattered in the most brutal way'. Good, hard-working people who didn't make it. Take a look at those doomed clients, say the Coffee Boys, "and then, the first time that you don't really need to

The boys are back...

In the middle of recessions and hard times, a book from the Coffee Boys provides a very useful help in finding a way through it all and still keeping a smile on your face.



The secret is in keeping your passion for good coffee and food... and wrapping it in a system

focus on the numbers any more because you seem to be putting a lot of money in the tills, stop and think about those wretched souls. You do not ever want to be one of those guys."

Happily, the entire emphasis of the rest of the book is to make sure you don't. And in typical Coffee Boys fashion, they approach the management of a coffee house from a very different angle to every other trade consultant. They don't spend time agonising over the difference between half a degree of temperature on a twenty-second espresso extraction (although they do spend some time discussing just why the coffee bar operator should look more deeply at filter coffee).

Instead, Coffee Boys method depends on achiev-

ing a balance between the coffee-geek approach and the business outlook, as typified by their story of Hector's Coffee Houses.

"Hector has been a barista for years and is highly skilled. It's arguable that he creates the finest espresso in the city. In Hector's mind, as long as there is great coffee in a funky environment, all the rest will just happen... how hard can the rest be when the real skill is in the art of espresso?"

It's a good and timely question. It has fooled many people.

Similarly, while many how-to books will tell you, at great length, how to prepare a business plan to obtain finance, the Boys' unusual but practical approach is to raise the question of why, when you present the business plan to the bank manager, does he skip your brilliant ideas and turn to the back page first? There is a very good point to be learned!

As always, in Coffee Boys work, we meet some people who will become quickly familiar as the standard 'types' in the coffee market. Not just Mervyn the Salesman (and, fortunately, how to deal with him) but 'Derek' the would-be entrepreneur who works out the profit margin on coffee and sits back in awe, thinking of the vast fortunes to be made in this business. (Have we not all thought that?)

And, sympathetically, they introduce us to 'Jill', possibly the most common character in the small cafe scene. She has the vision strong in her mind, but no cash, and discovered very quickly that she has very little in the way of useful management skills either. "She will decide to be there every hour the shop is open, and just bully the whole operation into some form of profitable business... the problem and reality is that Jills often do make a little money, but it takes them twelve hours a day, six days a week. She will consider herself a businesswoman, join a business organisation, and huddle in a support group with other Jills who console themselves that this is the way it has to be."

Jill is wrong, say the Coffee Boys. She will work herself into an early grave. And the tragic thing is, the cafe trade is full to the brim with Jills.

And here, shining through the cautionary tales of Coffee Boys consultancy, is the one single constant theme which Richardson and Gilmartin always keep stressing - 'systems' actually work. There is a proven formula, a system of processes, which will make a coffee shop work.

This doesn't mean losing the 'passion for great coffee' or any other parts of the familiar coffee-shop dream, say the Coffee Boys. You don't have to give yourself up completely to the corporate way of life to achieve success.

The real secret is in keeping your passion for great coffee and food, and 'wrapping it up in a clean and coherent system'.

And if you do that, say the Coffee Boys - the Dream really can come true.

Setting Up and Managing Your Own Coffee Bar - How To Books, ISBN 978-1-84528-327-8. £14.99

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Every café in every street in every town serves tea... and probably one in a thousand actually promotes it. The national drink goes completely unpromoted - and yet, say the tea suppliers, putting a bit of effort behind it can have very acceptable results.

The effort is not new thinking, says Nick Kilby of Teapigs - typically, it involves external work, and all an operator has to do is look at the A-boards used by coffee-houses.

"It's not original - the coffee companies have shown the way, but up to now, nobody has promoted tea outside the door, the way you see Illy and other coffee brands. You can do it for tea, and we believe 'Teapigs served here' signs may well decide customers to choose tea, when maybe they wouldn't have done so."

Inside, he adds, the question of the tea menu remains a vexed one. You can do as much selling in your tea menu as on your coffee list, but why do so few caterers do it?

"It has long grated on us is that you so often simply see a menu with the word 'tea'. If you're lucky, it will be expanded to English Breakfast, Darjeeling and Peppermint - and that's it.

"On a tea menu, you can say as much to sell your tea as you can with anything else you offer... but only a very few do. So we will supply the tea menu, artworks, the venue's logo, and write ups for six or seven teas.

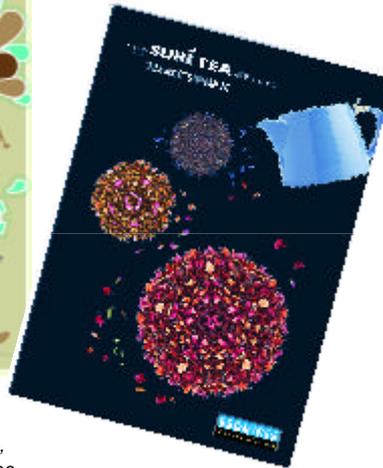
"The customer also expects the server to know what they've got, even if it's just the difference between green, black and red tea, but the general standard in this really is pretty

Don't just stock tea... sell it!

One of the most profitable beverages of all is woefully undersold... so how does the trade inspire interest in tea?



Two current tea posters - Tetley's generic 'hydrate' one, and the Esquires coffee house chain promotion of Suki teas.



poor. This means our point-of-sale material has to work all the harder.

"But we know it does, and we know our menus get read - because they 'walk' with the customers, and we always have to provide more!"

Back a menu up visually, adds Teapigs.

"Tea has always been a 'behind the counter' product, and boxes of tea have never looked good - but we decided that our tea temples in glass

jars would work, and they do. These are good quality Bodum jars, and they look very stylish. Jamie Oliver's Fifteen put them up behind the bar, so if you've got the space, we say use them."

The most effective point-of-sale is the menu, says Marco Olmi at Drury.

"You will be surprised by how willing your customers will be to try new teas with a little encouragement. My personal favourite at the moment is Darjeeling Superfine Tippy Golden Flowery Orange Pekoe, grade 1, from Margaret's Hope Estate, a fine quality single estate mid-season harvest that is full of flavour with a light and lingering character.

"It is important to offer a semi-fermented tea, such as a Formosan Orange Blossom Oolong, and your menu would not be complete without a couple of green teas from China and Japan and herbal or fruit teas."

Dee and Tansu Ozsoykal of Deelight's tea room in Eltham, south London, tried it. "We were unsure whether we could persuade our customers to move away from English Breakfast and Earl Grey, but now they are more than willing to try an Assam

BOP or a Sencha Japanese green. We began a light 'theming' by introducing a display of teapots... and before we knew it we were inundated with offers of free teapots!"

"I would use the chalkboard," says Ralph Lutton at Brodies. "You always see coffees on the chalkboards, but not tea!

"A 'tea of the month' is still a great idea. Guest beers remain popular, guest coffees have waned a bit, but guest teas are still very good for telling a story, and they do get attention.

"One place that has trained its people to tell a story is the Balmoral, in Edinburgh. The chef has a Michelin star, and heaven help the staff if they don't care like he does! He has shown that staff can be enthused about tea, and when I went there as a mystery shopper, I loved to hear the staff say 'you'll really like this...'

"That's what I want to see on chalkboards - 'you'll really like this tea... try it!'"

Say what unusual teas do, recommends Café du Monde - camomile promotes restful sleep, peppermint aids digestion, and berry is good as a tonic. An effective point of sale is the Newby 'living tea' menu - it is a wooden box which opens to show a tea menu with real tea samples.

Promote at different times through the day, says Edward Berry, Newby's marketing director. Instead of simply a

breakfast tea, offer the choice of Indian Breakfast, which is more subtle than the conventional English Breakfast, or a full Assam. Maybe offer a peppermint tea after dinner, or promote a matching menu - scones or sponge cakes with Darjeeling or jasmine.

How you market your tea determines whether your business becomes a 'destination' venue, suggests Andrea Stopher, marketing manager at Twinings.

"Seventy-five per cent of purchasing decisions are made at point of purchase. Customers will generally only ask for products they can see on menus and counters, which is why it is important. We have launched an online promotional calendar to help



Teapigs' tea menus

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caterers download posters promoting a tea of the month, seasonal specials, or promote themed events such as Fairtrade Fortnight, or loyalty promotions."

Cooper's Coffee, which launched its English Garden range of nine Fairtrade string-and-envelope teas in February, says that a bespoke table menu has increased tea sales by forty per cent in some cases, and offers free graphic design help in putting one together.

"If customers want to discuss more unique ways of promoting their drinks we are happy to dedicate support to them - one cafe recently ran a 'free hug with every coffee' campaign!"

(In response to the obvious question, we learn that Cooper did not supply the hugs).

Why not copy the way coffee houses promoted the relaxing space of sofas, asks Martin Ward of the Country Range Group.

"Tea would benefit from the revival of a ritual - turning tea drinking into an 'experience' in the style of coffee could help revive the old appreciation of taking one's time over tea. Why not use tea to recreate the experience of sitting down in a soft leather sofa for a latte or a cappuccino - a relaxing atmosphere, wi-fi, free newspapers... and tea? If coffee houses are popular at different times of day, with younger customers in the evening, what does this mean for your tea promotion? Why not try a themed traditional afternoon tea offering, highlighting local suppliers or ethically-sourced products?"

Is promotion of a household-name tea a good idea? There is a school of thought which says that a brand can be so well-known that it becomes invisible - people think 'oh, I know all about them', and switch off.

Not surprisingly, Peter Haigh at Tetley offers a robust argument in favour of the value of promoting his brand.

"I may go into my local cafe and not consciously notice the branded ketchup bottle, but I do notice it when its gone and been replaced by the unbranded generic stuff! It's not the being noticed, its the being completely absent that creates doubt.

"Tea hasn't exactly been over-branded out of home, so lets get the branding out there and then worry about it becoming invisible once it has been established."

There is also a school of thought which says that heavy branding can be a drag on progress. Rivals else-

where have derided the Tetley Tea Folk characters in the same way as they do the PG Tips chimps, alleging that they have simply taken the image of tea downmarket - but then again, it is said that the Tetley Tea Folk have sold thirty million collectable items, an enviable turnover.

"I accept that heavy branding can be a drag, and branding for branding's sake is daft. I think that the job of the branded tea companies is to get people to drink tea out of home, and there are many general taste and health messages that we can use at the point of purchase - our 'hydrate and invigorate' poster is an example."

The guest tea is an effective tactic, says Haigh.

"When I worked in motorways in the halcyon days of roadside catering, we managed to shift over a thousand cups of Earl Grey in a week because we stumbled upon an exciting marketing ploy - it was: 'would you like to try a cup of refreshing Earl Grey for a change?'"



Peter Haigh

"In my own establishment, I would offer an afternoon tea 'taster menu' to fill up quiet afternoons - a lavish selection of cream cakes and a set of four exciting new tea flavours to try.

"Afternoon tea also tends to be a look back to bygone days. So get out the ration cards, split open a few teabags, and offer a nostalgic memory-lane promotion of the teas that got Britain through the blitz!"

Tetley has also now announced a decision to use Rainforest Alliance certified teas throughout its range - the entire range should be certified by 2016.

"The whole reasoning behind point-of-sale," says Jon Marlow at Cafedirect, "is to get to the customer before they make the choice, and to demonstrate that you offer them choice. Caterers are beginning to cotton on to this, although the realization is sometimes better than the execution."

There are three drivers to attracting attention at point of sale - 'disruption', which is something that makes you reconsider your choice, which could be a window poster or a wobblers in the right place, the mechanics of the place of staff in point of sale, which is very important because they have a role in encouraging choice, and the place of sampling at point of sale. Sampling builds interest in the concept, and in the idea that drinking tea is a pleasurable experience - and we know we get fantastic conversion rates from sampling."

British tea-brewing may be all wrong...



The little mesh filter in the base sits above a small hole through which the tea brews into the cup.

The accepted methods of making tea, the ones we are all taught when growing up, are being challenged by a new product from Australia.

According to work by Ian Bersten, an Australian tea merchant, three long-held and established beliefs about tea-making are wrong - that tea should be brewed for 3-5 minutes, that large-leaf tea is better than small-leaf tea, and that brewing in a pot is the best method.

Bersten's Tea-Cha method employs a kind of filter system. It consists of a conical container, with a fine mesh filter in the base; beneath the mesh is a single hole. The container is placed on top of a tea-cup or mug, two or three grammes of fine tea is placed on the mesh, and hot water is poured on. It takes thirty seconds for the brewed tea to pass through into the cup beneath, the filter is removed, and the drinking cup topped up with more hot water.

Several aspects of this will horrify the traditional tea world. One is the argument that fine tea is better than large-leaf tea, whereas the modern speciality tea trade maintains that large-leaf tea is the very best that can be offered.

The general argument is that large-leaf tea presents a bigger surface to the water, and thus improves the extraction of flavour. In fact, says Bersten, such tea brewed in a teapot is a waste of flavour: "With a water temperature of 85C, the extraction of flavour from leaf tea is likely to be around 35 per cent of what is possible, and you throw out a lot of the flavour with the leaves. It is very difficult to get a fully-flavoured tea from a teapot.

"The fact that 94 per cent of people in Britain drink tea-bag tea is a testament to the failure of teapot tea."

He also questions the belief that tea should steep for three or more minutes. The best extraction, he says, is by 'leaching', in which the water flows past the tea leaves and takes the flavour with it, rather in the way that espresso coffee is brewed.

It is generally accepted that in tea-

bags, the tea is in extremely tiny particles, the kind of which Ian Bersten approves. However, he also argues that the entire tea-bag concept also inhibits extraction of flavour.

It is also now generally accepted that in Britain, the time for which a tea-bag is usually steeped in a cup is now down to eleven seconds, although one tea-blender has told Boughton's Coffee House magazine that he believes current practice to be as low as seven seconds.

This is widely thought to be bad practice, but Ian Bersten says that steeping a tea-bag for three minutes will not produce a better result.

"Eleven seconds is certainly wrong, but the real point is that longer brewing will not give a satisfactory result, as the tea-bag process is inherently impossible. The inability of the water to pass through a teabag means results are very poor.

"A demonstration proves it. Brew a teabag in a mug for five minutes - then take the exhausted tea out of the paper tea-bag, put it into my filter, and brew again. The improvement in colour and taste is immediately obvious. The conclusion is that the tea-bag does not allow the full flavour of the tea to be extracted."

The use of very fine tea through the Tea-Cha is said to give a brighter and cleaner flavour. The product is already in use in some catering venues in Melbourne, including some which have capacity for hundreds of customers.

The product has yet to achieve a distributor in Britain. However, for those interested in the full argument, Ian Bersten has published a slim paperback book: 'Tea - How Tradition Stood In the Way of the Perfect Cup'.

Details: www.tea-cha.com.au



Is this, at last, going to be the year of the great leap forward in profitable out-of-home tea? Everybody said that 2009 was going to be the year when consumers accepted that good tea is a beverage worth paying for, but it didn't happen - probably the combined effect of a recession and a failed barbecue summer.

There are two problems in justifying the price of out-of-home tea, say many in the trade. The major problem is that consumers simply do not believe tea is anything superior to the drink they can make at home - so why should they pay a high price for it?

The Tea Council recently surveyed a collection of its 'top tea venues' to see what they thought would be the most profitable tea trends for 2010. These are mostly ritzy venues, but even so, several of the suggestions they made can be taken up at high street level.

The manager of Swissotel's Mauve Lounge was one of several who predicted that afternoon tea would become more popular for business meetings.

This is a trend already seen in the hotel sector, and of course the coffee-bar trade has done well as a one-to-one meeting venue for years, but many venues could usefully promote their

Will this be 'the year of good tea'...at last?

appropriateness for 'tea meetings'.

A quite unexpected forecast from the same venue was that 'tea cocktails have the potential to be summer's big trend'. This of course involves selling alcohol, but for venues who can manage it, the idea is worth a thought.

(Typical tea cocktails are the Royal Tea, which is a chilled drink of equal parts Earl Grey tea and gin, with lemon juice and sugar, and said to have been invented by Beefeater to promote the film *The Queen* a few years back. There is the Tea Martini, which is very American, and involves vodka and sweet iced tea, and many more).

Brown's Hotel, the Grosvenor House, and the Athenaeum predict a future for themed or bespoke afternoon teas, 'such as children's afternoon tea parties, baby showers, hen parties and even bachelors' afternoon tea'. We do of course have to remind the trade that the Red Hat Society, the still-growing worldwide movement for ladies, traditionally meets in tea venues.

Several of the main 'afternoon tea' places did however highlight one thing which appears to have become firmly fixed - the cupcake now appears to be the fashionable new accompaniment for tea. (The Handmade Cake Company predicted this last autumn, and seem to have got it right).

But what of the high street venues?

Elaine Higginson at First Choice recognizes the problem of charging a good price for everyday black tea, but believes presentation can be the answer. "Unlike a great cappuccino, a great cuppa is easy to make at home - so caterers need to set the out-of-home tea experience apart to make it desirable. Drink-in tea must be sold with a sense of occasion - serve tea in a pot and ensure that the cups are heated, present it on a tea-tray with a jug of fresh milk, sugar bowl and good quality biscuits. How the tea is served is what gives the customer the experience that they wouldn't get at home, and that's what adds value."

On a Radio 4 Food programme in January, Ed Eisler of Jing Tea also criticised products which are packed as 'premium' or 'speciality' teas on supermarket shelves, and suggested that they are little better than ordinary tea... and sometimes not as good.

"Progress is in the specialist end," he said. "You cannot judge specialist tea by what is in the supermarket. Their tea buyers don't understand tea well - they don't understand what they're putting on their shelves."

Get ready to take advantage of a resurgence, says Ralph Luton at Brodies.

"Tea went down, but is now on the way back.

"The focus on price became so much that most supermarkets now have an own-label tea which is undrinkable, and a lot of damage has been done by this tea. Just open up a tea-bag, and you'll think it's wood-shavings! And much of the advertising of this tea has driven the perception of quality down.

"So the great challenge, between both ourselves, the hospitality trade and the public, is to prove that there is good tea to be served. But fortunately, the trade is, however, no longer snob - by about infusions and speciality teas."

More speciality and artisan tea companies are starting up every week, adds Oscar Wooley of Suki Tea.

"This can only be good news. Even the well-known tea companies who for

so many years relied on convenience are taking note of what the more artisan tea companies are up to and changing suit... this is great! I foresee that the quality of tea available to the trade will continue to rise.

"We are already seeing a steep rise in competition for loose leaf tea - but I warn people in the café sectors that simply offering any loose leaf tea is not good enough. You must choose quality, and you must focus on educating your customers on the choices you have made.

"We have definitely done our research on this one. We have also found from the hundreds of cafes who now serve our teas that bringing a teapot into the service and creating an 'experience' means that the café owner can charge as much for their pot of quality, well-presented loose leaf tea as they do for their coffee, and that they get repeat custom. The number of tea servings increases when the tea offering is effectively presented."

And economically so, says Mighty Leaf's Alan Mellor: "Many caterers have seen that tea no longer need be seen as the 'poor relation' of the beverage world. Tea is inherently very profitable, and arguably the most profitable product available to the bar or cafe owner. Distinctive quality signature blends can easily command a premium at the same price point as a good cappuccino or latte, and without all the expensive equipment!"

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DRINK REAL TEA



An extremely unusual new brand is Make Us A Brew, which has been created by a DJ and cartoonist called Mr Scruff. He has been selling tea at music festivals for some time, and has been working on the theory that conventional fruit and herbal infusions are not powerful enough for a male consumer base.

The result, says the inventor himself, is a tea which is not so much a builder's tea as a wrestler's!

A typical flavour is Big Chill tea, which features rooibos, as a caffeine-free alternative to a black tea base, pear and cinnamon. The combination is sweet and spicy, and one food critic said: 'Smells like pear crumble with warming cinnamon.'

The Look Lively blend features yerba mate from Argentina, which is described as 'a stimulant without the jitters', with organic lemongrass and mint.

All the teas, herbal and fruit ingredients are certified organic, and although the smaller packs are in card, there are attractive tin caddies featuring the creator's cartoons.



One of the biggest problems with tea remains the takeaway version. It is generally assumed that this tea will be made with bags, in which case the perennial problem is – what does the consumer do with the bag when they're ready to drink the tea?

We have recently reported the solution proposed by Hallsen and Lyon of Germany, in which a tea-bag is allowed to brew in the cup, then drawn up into a recess in the lid.

For sometime, there has been a PG Tips product, which uses a pyramid tagged tea bag pre-threaded through the lid.

The brand argues that the caterer does not need to supply somewhere to put used tea bags, as this is pulled through and locked into the lid, to be thrown away with the empty cup.

Two new products have come to light.

Mighty Leaf has the TeaTop lid, which features a cross-shaped slit. The tea pouch tag is posted through from the underside before serving. The company explains that when the consumer pulls the string after brewing, one corner of the tea pouch enters the slits, which grip it tightly.

A far more unusual option seems to be the Tea2Fly from Crem (which used to be Style Café) and which may be the first attempt to serve loose-leaf tea in a takeaway setting.

This product is, we believe, a Danish invention, and the unique aspect of it is a membrane in the lid which captures the residues, and allows only the liquid to pass through.

Meanwhile Vegware, the UK's only totally plastic-

Takeaway tea - yet more lids!



The novel lid from Crem (above). The crescent-shaped sip-through hole is covered by a gauze-like membrane.

The Mighty Leaf product (right) uses the concept of storing the teabag under the lid.



free food packaging company, has won the *Caterer and Hotelkeeper* Equipment and Supplies Excellence Awards.

Vegware's compostable hot cup lid won the disposables category and was also commended in the green category.

Vegware's MD and founder, Joe Frankel, told us:

"In a consumer-led industry, people do want an eco-led package.

"To a degree, our job is also about quantifying the benefits for both the trade customer and the consumer, and with many of them, we discuss not the bottom line, but the top-line – this is a business-growth issue, and the reality is that in a world where everybody and his dog is using takeaway cups, being in the right place, just at the beginning of a trend, puts you in a leadership position.

"Nobody has talked to the consumer about this story. We need to promote a way to allow them to buy into it - nobody has put it on a poster like they would with Fairtrade.

"But it is already out in the field being used, in some of the fashionable coffee bars in the city of London (notably, Dose and the Espresso Room), in a lot of workplace catering, and in a hospital which has just switched entirely to eco-packaging.

"The correct term is compostable, because biodegradable is a misleading term. A tree is biodegradable... but a log-cabin isn't! Compostable means biodegradable within a practical time, and probably industrially.

"We haven't thought of the tea question yet... it was hard enough work to achieve the compostable lid. But when one format wins through, we shall be ready to work with the happy designer on a compostable version of it!

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Sacred coffee talk at Cafe Plus

One of the stars of the new breed of modern antipodean coffee shops will be speaking at the Café Plus show, which runs as part of the Convenience Retailing event in Birmingham from 21-24 March.

This will be Matthew Clark from Sacred Café in Soho - it was, of course, Matthew's presentation at the Allegra summit last summer which brought the whole question of the flat white to wide trade attention, and which may be considered largely responsible for what the major high-street chains then did with their promotions of the drink. This will be a rare opportunity for members of the on-the-go food and beverage trades to hear the first-hand experience of driving café value from someone acknowledged to be at the pinnacle of the modern coffee-shop trade.

An interesting contribution to the first day's seminars will be a debate on the role of the bean-to-cup machine in the high-footfall convenience food world - not so much a matter of what the modern machine can do, but how to find the right machine for the job.

(Curiously, at the end of the second day's session, there will be a presenta-

tion from the very top of the super-automatic bean-to-cup market, when Coffee Nation will speak on gourmet vending machines - this is the company which took the bean-to-cup concept to its ultimate in high-footfall motorway service area sites). Also speaking on the first day will be Ivan Pantovich of Caffè Torelli, talking on the importance of the correct barista training in the success of a café business.

On the third day, the Him research organization will present the results of its findings into the true place of coffee in the café and convenience market. They will also present their top ten do's and don'ts for success in the coffee sector.

Another coffee name, Costa, will then discuss the matter of breakfast - it is a market sector which the pub trade has done well to work on, and the café trade should approach the subject with equal thoroughness.

Bath festival encourages work in the coffee trade

The Bath Coffee Festival, the first event aimed at the consumer to promote interest in quality coffee, has already achieved an interesting list of participants - but at the same time, it has also brought up interesting points about funding for barista training.

In an attempt to both perform a social service and also highlight the opportunities for careers within the coffee trade, Angus McKenzie of Metropolitan Coffee has undertaken to give training to half a dozen unemployed youngsters, who have already been selected by a local training agency. These youngsters will be taken to Metropolitan's barista academy in London before the festival, will be trained to a good standard, and then will appear at the Bath festival to show off what they have learned.

Prospective employers in Bath have already been contacted, and will be at the festival in the hope of taking on one of the trainees.

Hilary Faulkner of Smart Training and Recruitment has selected the six trainees from about two dozen applicants.

"They are excited about the idea of training in London," she told us. "At first their interest was in working in hospitality generally rather than coffee... but I think this will change as soon as they get to London and meet the trainer. There are already a variety of businesses in Bath, from coffee shops to small restaurants, who have

expressed an interest in taking them on."

The unexpected aspect which has come up in discussions between Metropolitan and the recruitment agency is the question of funding for training in the hospitality industry.

The VRQ in barista work may not, it is thought, qualify for government support in the way that a full food and drink service apprenticeship might - however, says Hilary Faulkner, only a third of employers are aware what support they can get for staff training, and Angus McKenzie at Metropolitan has acknowledged that an unexpected side-benefit of this project is that employers in the café trade might be encouraged to go out and research what support might be available to employers in our trade.

By the end of February, around two dozen trade companies had booked space to appear at the Bath Coffee Festival - the most notable recent arrival has been that of Taylors of Harrogate as a main sponsor of the event, but familiar names elsewhere in the list include Metropolitan, Martin Carwardine, Taylors syrups, Suki tea, Teapigs, Lavazza and Cafedirect.



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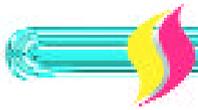
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The latest in 'seasonal' coffees has come from Union Hand-Roasted of London, whose Rogue espresso has been developed in partnership with the city's Taylor Street Baristas.

"It is a little unconventional in that it is not just a blend focused around three or four flavours, to be constant throughout the year," say Union. "The blend has a distinctive character now, perhaps dominated by the new crop from Rwanda that is really outstanding at the moment... but this is going to change though in a month or so. New crop Sumatra coffee is coming in early March, and if this is particularly exciting we'll adjust the blend. The blend will change as the new crop coffee harvests move from the northern to southern hemispheres, and not according to our seasons."

A changing blend is not a safe one for the barista, but does allow for some experimentation, says Union.

"A skilled barista needs to identify the desired flavours and bring these out. Rogue will change over time and it will take a skillful barista to enjoy discovering new notes as Rogue's character changes, and create different flavours by adjusting the shots to allow each of the coffee origins to 'sing'."

More counterfeit beans on the market

We have had another 'passing-off' story reported - in this case, a roaster was offered Colombian coffee at half the price he usually pays. It was immediately evident, he says, that the coffee was a fake.

At the importer Mercanta, Stephen Hurst told us that he was not surprised to hear it.

"Colombia is so short of coffee that there will doubtless be hundreds of cases of 'Colombian' coffee with nothing of the sort in the bag. It is simple to switch bags, or mark a jute bag as you wish.

"Colombia used to produce some 12 million bags, and they had demand for them. This country markets its coffee very successfully, so two years of below average production has come to haunt them. If their production now is really in fact ten million bags, and demand is still for twelve million, where do you think the rest comes from?"

"The issue of real provenance of green coffee is one that is honestly quite impossible to verify.

"We investigated genetic fingerprinting of green and roasted coffee with a UK university years ago. The research grant needed was in the region of £250,000 if I recall, so needless to say nothing moved forward but we do know that country of origin could conceivably be determined from roasted coffee... if you had a database of all the green beans - so you can see the enormity of the problem.

"The brutal truth is that you have little complete satisfaction of the actual provenance of green, greenish, faded, 'somewhat green' unroasted coffee beans unless you trust your supplier quite intimately."

(It was recently reported that a team of chemists from the University of Illinois have developed a 'coffee analyser' that can distinguish between brands of roasted coffee, and can also tell between coffee beans that have been roasted at different temperatures or lengths of time. The inventors say the new 'electronic nose' may help coffee roasters determine cheaply, and instantly, whether batches of coffee are as good as previous batches.)

The Capital Coffee Roasters company of Wimbledon say they are the first British roasters to commit entirely to Utz Certified coffees.

This certification, which used to be known as Utz Kapeh ('good coffee' in Mayan) may be the biggest coffee certifier in the world, and requires farmers to keep to good business and farming practices, adhere to certain 'social criteria' for workers and their families, and adopt certain environmental standards. It operates a tracing system to show buyers exactly where any coffee comes from.

"All our customers will now know that their coffee comes from a sustainable source," says Roy Grey of Capital.

"We have always prided ourselves on the quality of our coffees and have tried to work with other certifications such as Fairtrade and Rainforest Alliance... unable to source both the quality and consistency we look for in our coffees, we turned to Utz Certified.

"We feel that at last we have found the final piece of the jigsaw!"

Unlike Fairtrade, Utz does not guarantee the farmer a minimum price - rather, the argument is that the standards empower a farmer to achieve a better price.

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Time was, when every tobacconists had a wooden Red Indian standing outside to advertise their business. It's probably politically-incorrect, but today a wooden Asian stands inside the front door of Atkinsons of Lancaster, bearing a tray of product.

This is a roastery and coffee shop dating from 1837, in which ancient jars still line the shelves behind the counter, elderly barrels and boxes still hold product although a 1930s tea blender does not appear to be still in use, and roaster Ian Steel still measures out his beans with a venerable seven-pound scoop, into one of a couple of ancient Whitmee roasters.

"Yes," he acknowledges, "we're part working museum, part tourist attraction, part business... and part a family home!

"We've rebuilt our 56lb Whitmee roaster, but we also have a 28lb which we bought from Pumpheys in Newcastle - it was the one he learned on as a lad and they were nearly in tears to see it installed and working here. I use them because I want to retain the character of Atkinsons."

The character is retained with some neat new ideas which look traditional - the Steels have successfully experimented with turning coffee sacks into shoulder bags, complete with extremely smart inner linings.

The Steels are not a family with a history of roasting - Ian came from TV production, realised he had to hit the ground running, and now Atkinsons has won its first coffee tasting award, a tea award ('for Blue Sky Blend - like a psychedelic Earl Grey!') and was listed in the Independent's guide to Britain's top 50 food shops.

And he services a growing collection of catering outlets.

"In June, right in the depths of a recession, we noticed thirty new wholesale accounts coming in - this just proves that if a grumpy old roaster drags himself to a trade show, or joins local business organisations, which I never thought I would do, that it has an effect. And we always invite café owners to come in and see what we do, and it's very exciting to us that they make the effort to do so.

"I love working hard with caterers on

Part working museum, part tourist attraction...



Ian Steel with his old Whitmee - and his old scoop

their coffee. And the best bit of PR we've ever done was to get our menus up to café tables - in one hotel, we take up three full A4 pages of their beverage menu! The roaster should be the caterer's repository for new ideas, and I would love to think of people using that Atkinsons menu as a way of discovering coffee, as if they're working their way through new coffees, and 'collecting' them.

"For a house coffee, we like to look at the demographics of the location. The blue-rinse set of Morecambe may be a more Kenyan blend (the Atkinsons history says that during the war, when few supplies came in, the only coffee which arrived here to be roasted was Kenyan) but we do an Italian blend which has a backbone which you wouldn't want to put into such places.

"Espresso Lusso is our Marilyn Monroe of coffees - soft, earthy, full-bodied, and an espresso which allows its skirts to float up! It's very unusual in that it has an El Salvador with Monsooned Malabar in it, and some washed robusta."

Someone in the coffee trade recently said the great problem is that the brewing at caterer level still hasn't caught up with the skill of the artisan roaster.

the problem is of policing every filter jug. We have to keep hammering this home, and it has to be part of the roaster's offering to make sure that all a customer's staff get training, and that we go back to provide intermediate training and train new staff.

"We're working hard to get more of our catering customers into the habit of airpots, and I do like the idea of the Marco jug which sets off an audible alarm after 20 minutes, when coffee should be too old to serve.

"A hotel here in Lancaster actually uses a grind-on-demand cafetiere system, which is very impressive - expensive, but certainly the way forward."

As Ian Steel loads his old Whitmee, we remind him that Marco Olmi of Drury once made the classic statement: 'you're not a real roaster until you've had a fire'.

"I bought Atkinsons from an old guy who reluctantly stayed on a week to see me started... and I had a fire in my first week.

"The old guy said - first, do not get flustered, and show the staff that you're not flustered. Second, put the burning stuff in this container. Third, put it out in car park across't street...

"And if you can put it next to a Porsche, so much t'better!"



Coffee-sack shoulder bags and a wooden servant at Atkinsons






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