



# Boughton's

## COFFEE HOUSE

More worthwhile hot-drink trade information than any other paper – and in less pages!

Nov/Dec 2010

### Coffee Nation's auto espresso takes awards

The standard of automatic coffee machines has been recognised to have reached new heights, says Coffee Nation. Last month, the company which pioneered self-serve speciality coffee machines in motorway service areas won two technology awards in two weeks.

The company took the 'new concept' prize at the Autovending awards, and then won the technology and innovation title at the Growing Business awards. Both titles recognised the Express machine, which features touch-screen use, payment by cash, notes, or all major credit and debit cards, and also the automatic addition of flavoured syrup shots.



Scott Martin showing his coffee credentials

"These awards finally recognise that coffee in a self-serve format does not mean compromising quality," managing director Scott Martin told *Coffee House*.

"We have invested over £7million in developing a self-serve system that gives consistently high-quality coffee. I believe we now monitor and control more aspects of the drink preparation process, on a cup-by-cup basis, than most of the coffee chains do.

"Don't forget, we have a very broad range of consumers, from real connoisseurs in a hurry, to white van man needing a caffeine kick.

"Our system has appeal to the masses, and features like the option of flavoured syrups are just another step in us replicating the coffee bar experience."

"Like Dyson re-invented the vacuum cleaner – Coffee Nation has re-invented coffee vending!"



### Wearing your heart on your sleeve...

*If you're really committed to your coffee-shop business, why not have your logo tattooed on your arm? This is Kaspar Basse of Joe and the Juice, who told the Allegra European Summit that 'the next generation of coffee bars cannot happen'. But what did he really mean? See page 10.*

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## AIEE helps cafes follow the espresso regulations

The Association of Independent Espresso Engineers has organised a partnership which should make it easier for caterers to fulfil their legal obligations in the use of espresso machines. The requirement for espresso machines to be regularly inspected and certified has come to wider attention since the explosion of a machine in a supermarket cafe – however, it is generally believed that a vast number of machines are not certified, due either to cafe operators not knowing the law, due to practical problems of organising certification, or simply due to operators ignoring their responsibility.

As recently reported in *Coffee House*, a problem exists in that espresso machines, being 'pressure vessels', must have an annual certification – however, a cafe's regular espresso engineer is not considered independent enough to count as the 'competent person' able to issue the certificate, and a third-party inspector has to be found and hired.

It is widely suggested, although there is no firm evidence to support the view, that many operators of commercial espresso machines find this too much of a nuisance, and simply do not bother following the regulations.

AIEE has now formed a partnership with Bureau Veritas, a specialist inspection and certification organisation which works across all kinds of industry, from counter-top machines to power stations. The new arrangement means that the AIEE member will arrange for both the engineer and BV's approved inspector to be onsite at the same time, and the whole procedure will be charged on a single invoice.

Mark Rosen, the business development manager for BV, told us:

"It is the operator's responsibility to have the inspection done, and we need the engineer on site to give us access to the inside of an espresso machine – the problem up to now is that getting the engineer, the inspector, and the cafe operator all onsite at once can be a nightmare of organisation.

**"A vast number of espresso machines do not have written evidence of inspection. And for what is not a great deal of money, that is silly."**

"Now it is one call."

It is generally assumed throughout the hot beverage trade that a vast number of espresso machines being used in commercial situations are not covered by a certificate of inspection. Both the AIEE and BV have been coy over whether the new move will actually encourage more caterers to comply with their legal responsibilities.

"We have certainly seen a sudden interest in examinations and inspections since the Sainsburys explosion," said one AIEE member. "Whether all this new interest comes from people who have failed to comply with the legislation before now, is something which remains to be seen."

At BV, Mark Rosen agrees that the pressure-vessel rules are too often flouted or ignored by those who operate commercial espresso machines.

"Certainly, a vast number of machines do not have the written evidence of inspection. And for what is not a great deal of money, that is silly."

One inspector qualified to certify an espresso machine told us: "Coffee house owners might like to think about

the law of corporate manslaughter. For a death caused by a machine improperly maintained, a cafe owner could conceivably go to jail. A lot will depend on the HSE enforcing the regulations... but they don't."

In response to this, the HSE told us: "It is true that if a HSE inspector finds a breach of the law, then he may take enforcement action, which could be an order to improve operations within a set time limit, or an order to stop operations immediately.

"HSE does indeed prosecute where there are serious breaches of the law, although we would not presume to speculate on any potential sentence."



Rock star Dave Stewart of the Eurythmics is writing a musical about Bar Italia, the Soho venue which is one of the UK's most famous coffee shops. He is writing the show with Ian le Frenais, who wrote the TV shows *Porridge* and *The Likely Lads*.

Another great London cafe to be featured onscreen is E Pellici of Bethnal Green, a Grade 2 listed building - it is in the new film *London Boulevard*. Oddly, it was also featured in the film *Nowhere Boy*, the film about John Lennon, where it was used as a Liverpool cafe.

Kenco is to launch Millicano, a coffee drink described as a 'whole-bean instant'. The product will be sold in a silver tube to make it stand out on supermarket shelves, and to 'imply premium credentials'.

Espresso Adesso, the coffee wholesaler from Kilbride, has been taken over by Miko. The Scots company has a turnover of £1.5 million.

Charles Dale of Flatcap Coffee on Strutton Ground Market, London, has been named 'market trader of the year' by Westminster City Council. The award is based on nominations by customers, and the council gives a period of free trading worth over £2,000.

The AMT coffee kiosk at Marylebone station in London donated one day's entire proceeds to a charity supported by the chairman of Chiltern Railways. He is taking part in a 9,000-mile trip in a 1930 Ford

Model A, in aid of Ponheary Ly, a Cambodian project which cares for destitute children. When AMT offered to support the cause, the chairman brought the vintage car to the station and parked it beside the coffee kiosk as an attention-getter. AMT is also selling cupcake pin badges during December, in aid of CLIC Sargent, the cancer charity for children and young people.

The latest coffee shop to act as a means of helping youngsters find a responsible job in the community is the Café of Good Hope, in Hither Green, London. It is run by the Jimmy Mizen Foundation, a children's charity run in memory of a murdered teenager. The café will act as a fundraising headquarters for the charity and a trouble-free destination for youngsters in the area, but will also give them training in business - Drury coffee is to operate barista courses for the cause.

The Smart Lid, the disposable colour-changing coffee-cup lid which we recently reported to have won an award from *Wall St Journal*, has done it again - it has been awarded the 'best innovation' award from Beverage World magazine of America. The product still seeks a British distributor.

Rosebuds coffee and craft shop in Cumnock, Scotland, has been forced to close down after thieves stole their roofing... three times in one month. On the last occasion, rain flooded the kitchen and destroyed their stocks.

## Anti-chain protests get polite

**The usual series of reactions to coffee shops opening in provincial towns has positive and negative features this month - the big names have been the subject of several protests, one of them particularly entertaining.**

An anti-Caffe Nero campaign in Christchurch appears to have been a very polite affair, according to reports in the local press. It seems that a collection of protesters from the town's independent coffee shops staged a protest outside the new Nero branch, which was to be opened by the town mayor. The protesters complained that by allowing the 28th coffee shop in the town, the council had exceeded its own guidelines by 22 per cent, and had endangered the livelihood of local family-run businesses.

In what appears to have been a delightfully courteous exchange, the Nero manager is reported to have met the protesters and expressed the hope that they would not all fall out. Jim Cregan of the Blend café is reported to have replied: "not at all, and we are just going to carry on, if that's all right?" The Nero manager is reported to have replied encouragingly: "You go for it!"

Jim and Susie Cregan later erected a sign outside their shop reading: 'dear mayor, we are the true Café Hero!'

In Sherborne, a petition against Costa's proposed opening was reported to have passed 3,000 signatures, and locals have complained that the area is becoming a 'clone town', one of those which features only national brands. In Bourne, the town mayor spoke out against Costa's application to open in an empty shop site - however, the local business chamber disagreed, saying that a big name could attract more people to the town. A local coffee shop owner responded: "most of the shops in town are empty. People are not going to come just for another coffee shop."

There was one complimentary response to an opening - the *Thornbury People* organisation in the south-west has complimented the Coffee1 chain in transforming a previously run-down video store.

## Cafe owner ejects guide dog

**The Portsmouth News has raised the legality of barring guide dogs from cafes, after a blind man was refused service at a venue in Gosport. The man was told 'you can't come in here with that dog', which the local paper has pointed out is unlawful.**

The RNIB has confirmed that it is an offence under the Disability Discrimination Act for a service provider to refuse entry to a blind or partially-sighted person who requires assistance from their guide dog. The maximum penalty is a fine of £1,400. The owner of the café involved reportedly said: "It was a perfectly nice, sunny day, he could have sat outside. He is taking advantage because he's blind."

The local paper has pointed out that the same café owner was criticised in the local press three years ago for throwing out a breastfeeding mother.

## Twinnings upsets the BNP

**The British National Party has had a considerable go at Twinnings, over the tea brand's plan to move a considerable part of its operation to Poland, with resulting job losses in the UK.**

The BNP leader Nick Griffin says Twinnings has committed 'a mad insult' to British workers, by telling them to train up their Polish replacements. There has already been a suggestion that in using EU funds to pay for the new factory, Twinnings has broken European Commission rules.

"Twinnings has a long and proud British heritage, and even supplies the Queen," said Griffin. "I have demanded that the £10 million grant be withdrawn from the firm. I am frankly disgusted with firms like Twinnings and Cadburys - they trade on their British roots but care little about our people. They cannot wait to move our jobs to cheap-labour countries to get more profit.

"Am I the only one who thinks this is madness, an insult?"

*This sign made our editor do a double-take when he saw it - but it turns out to be one of a series made for Union Hand-Roasted of London, which have now cropped up around the country. It's a three-dimensional branded takeaway cup which the brand has mounted on wall signs and hanging signs... we saw it on a pavement A-board.*



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# Loyalty card on the i-phone

Coffee shop owner Tony Lywood of Keswick has come up with the i-phone 'app' answer to the paper loyalty card. He is one of several trade players to produce their own versions of mobile technology for customer service in recent weeks.

The Lywood system works by scanning a code in the coffee shop; on the i-phone screen there is a representation of the traditional loyalty card design, and when the required number of coffees has been bought, the system shows that the next one should be free of charge.

"As One Gratis Ltd, we have developed the i-phone app which solves the problem of drawers of paper loyalty cards in shops, and of people losing their cards," Tony Lywood told *Coffee House*. "We will capture all e-mails of loyal customers, so we can directly contact and update them on the app. It has taken six months and several tens of thousands of pounds to develop. The 'tecchie' involved in it is a rock-climber like me, and we dreamed this idea up on a beach beneath a crag in Thailand. It works, and is completely 'green', as there is no paper."

Details from 07789 886015

Meanwhile, Urban Coffee of Birmingham, which has just celebrated its first year in business, has released an i-phone app that allows customers to order coffee then come in store and pick it up, reducing queues. "We are pretty sure we are the first in the UK to do this, beating all the major high street chains," Urban's Simon Jenner told us.

Elsewhere, Starbucks' plan to target consumers with money-off electronic vouchers has not been universally welcomed. Customers who sign up for the scheme will be sent a text message when they pass any Starbucks. Some consumer organisations say it's a threat to personal privacy, but the phone company involved says that customers have to opt-in to the system, so privacy is not endangered.

McDonald's is to use a 'location-based, social media scavenger hunt' to promote its new caramel mocha in America. This means that it will use Twitter accounts and Facebook pages to give clues about where giant McCafe cups are hidden. The first user to find a cup will receive a year's free drinks, and a hundred runners-up will get free-drink vouchers. The company has pointed out the major advantage of the campaign – apart from the free drinks, it doesn't cost anything.

## Caffe Society sets out its trade stall

Caffe Society of Leeds has set up an independent trade supply division called the Brew Group. The new division, which will be staffed by trade sales manager Clive Danby and his existing team, will take over sales of Brasilia, Bunn, and Solis machines, and the new HLF bean-to-cup range.

Steve Mooring, managing director of Caffe Society, has explained that the development is to overcome the familiar situation, experienced in all distributive industries, of a danger of an importer competing against its own trade customers for the business of an end-user.

"Caffe Society has been a one-stop shop, supplying coffee-shops, hoteliers and all caterers with coffee, machines and engineering services," says Mooring. "And we also have a trade distribution network."

"In any trade route, some distributors will get worried that the importer of a machine might be selling against them to the same customer. We don't step on our distributors' toes, but to overcome any doubt, we have split ourselves into two divisions."

"The Brew Group will only supply trade distributors. We will certainly talk with caterers, restaurateurs and so on, but we will not supply them with a machine - we will put the machine to them through the distribution route. This makes it clear to the trade's distributors that we are supporting them, not selling against them."

The new division has its own website, [www.thebrewgroup.co.uk](http://www.thebrewgroup.co.uk).

## Two awards for Beyond the Bean's tea

Cosy, the tea brand launched by Beyond the Bean, has won a couple of design awards. In the Cream awards, which are run by the advertising and marketing industry, the product picked up a gold award for packaging, and then also collected the special prize which the awards chairman gives to his favourite entry. A curiosity of the design is that every pack features a different knitting stitch, and the knitters themselves were recognised in the awards.



The One Gratis screen

We were fascinated to see the latest in the relatively-modern trend for café owners to use their table tops as advertising media - the Café Caesar of Swiss Cottage in London has devoted each table top to a laminated advertisement for Wickes, the hardware superstore. (The Morning Star recently commented that the Caesar serves 'the finest coffee in north London').

A Portsmouth coffee stall has been in trouble for noise during a Remembrance Sunday service. The Coffee Cup stall in Guildhall Square does not usually trade on a Sunday, but had been asked to open for that day's service by the council - however, the sound of the café's generator during the two-minute silence then caused complaints. The operator reported that they turned the generator off on request, but by the time they could restart again after the service, the crowds had all gone - as a result, complying with the council's request brought them complaints, bad publicity, and a trading loss!

The Italian Beverage Company has gained Vegetarian Society approval for its Simply range, which includes syrups, sauces, smoothies and chocolate drinks.

Agriculture officials in Honolulu have proposed 'quarantine areas' to try to stop the coffee bean borer from spreading from Kona to other Hawaii coffee districts. This will require the fumigation of any green coffee shipped out of a quarantine area.

Andrew Tucker, formerly of the Jika Jika coffee bar in Bath, has launched Raw, a 70/30 arabica blend of Ethiopian Harrar and Sidamo, described as 'a stunning full bodied chocolatey espresso with a hint of citrus and blackcurrant'. The launch is a joint venture with the local Red and White wine merchant.

The Innocent company has lost its claim that smoothies should be exempt from VAT. The company had argued that its smoothies are a 'liquefied fruit salad' rather than a 'beverage', and that a bowl of the raw ingredients are not subject to VAT. The case dates back to 2007, when Innocent tried to claim back VAT on smoothie sales; a tax tribunal has ruled that the Treasury was right to refuse the claim. Richard Reed, founder of Innocent, said: "this ruling is not in the interest of the nation's health. It is absurd that smoothies, which contain portions of fruit and help people live more healthily, are subject to VAT at a full rate when junk food like burgers, chips and doughnuts are sold tax-free."

Barista trainer Youri Vlag, who has just changed his company name from Absolute to Limini Coffee, has created what he thinks is a 'first' – a course to teach baristas how to impress their customers. The 'presenting with presence' course is designed to 'take things further than 'just' coffee, and deeper into customer service skills.

An advertisement for Espresso Products. At the top is the logo "PURVEYORS OF Espresso Products FINE BARISTALIA". Below it, text reads "MANY OTHER PRODUCTS AVAILABLE FOR THE PROFESSIONAL BARISTA ONLINE" and "WE OFFER FULL CUSTOMISATION PERSONALISATION SERVICE". The central image shows several coffee tools in polaroid-style frames, each with a handwritten label: "Coffee Tamper", "Portafilters &amp; Baskets", "Custom Modifications", "Milk Jugs", "Flicker Ringers", and "Edge Temp Mats". At the bottom, text says "WHY NOT ORDER A PRO TAMP TAMPER AND HAVE IT LASER ENGRAVED WITH YOUR COMPANY LOGO..." and the website "WWW.ESPRESSO-PRODUCTS.CO.UK".

## More pubs go for the coffee market

There is a lot of coffee action in the pub sector. JD Wetherspoon, which pioneered the pub trade's attack on the early-morning market, has now decided to open later for breakfast at around 70 per cent of its sites. Some will open at 7am, some at 8am and about a third of the estate opening at 9am.

Wetherspoon is certainly moving towards the takeaway coffee market, although are not promoting the service – chairman Tim Martin has said that his strategy is always to keep people inside his premises, but to sell takeaway coffee if asked for it. However, the trade is certainly significant enough for the chain to now be planning a move away from its Lavazza-branded takeaway cups to a design which will promote its own identity first.

Pub operator Barracuda is to sell Costa coffee across its entire estate of 217 managed pubs, and will open at 9am with a new breakfast menu.



S&N's strategy document

The Scottish and Newcastle pub chain is the latest to seek a significant increase in its coffee business. The Bazar brand, owned by S&N's parent Heineken, is being launched across the pub estate and S&N has taken up something which we have been predicting for ages - it is to compete in takeaway coffee. The pub company has produced *Grounds for Success*, a very thorough marketing and training document for its pub managers.

The group's food development manager Ben Bartlett (who, we noticed, was at the European coffee summit last month) has observed that "coffee is increasingly becoming the daytime drink of choice for some consumers, and is proving highly resilient in the current economic climate". The Bazar brand is an Utz-certified coffee.

However, the secret of a successful pub is still good beer served by a friendly landlord, according to the Greene King chain. The pub chain's survey found that two-thirds of customers said a good choice of food and drinks was the main requirement - only seven per cent wanted coffee and a range of tea. One per cent want wi-fi.

By contrast, the Queen's Arms pub in Goring has split itself into two sections, with a coffee house in one part and the pub in the other. The café side will operate from 7am to 2pm, and will also feature a takeaway coffee service.

## Lavazza invents espresso flavours in a baby-bottle

One of the most unusual flavouring products to appear in the coffee trade has been created by Lavazza – *Coffee House* magazine discovered it behind the brand's bar at a Slow Food festival, and on investigation found that it is a flavouring essence formatted like a baby-bottle dropper.



The new Lavazza baby-bottle essence dispensers

"This is part of our passion for breaking limits and challenging trends," Giuseppe Lavazza told us. (Lavazza were, of course, among the first to experiment with coffee in foams and in various semi-solid forms).

"We see how, in the UK and USA, people more and more use coffee with syrups – but sometimes they just turn the drinks into coffee milkshakes. The delicate use of a flavour is more interesting... how do you get a small enough amount to enhance the coffee, perhaps an espresso, without going to a milkshake?"

"The answer may be to treat the flavour as a perfume, or 'essence'. We have created essences of rose, cinnamon, cardamom and orange. These are very volatile aromas, and a few drops will 'aromatise' an espresso – a special pleasure immediately comes out, and yet you have not damaged the essential nature of the coffee.

"This is very interesting for high-end restaurants, where the creative chef wants to open a new door in coffee. In Versailles, we did a presentation with the rose aroma in an espresso, served with rose petals scattered by the cup - the effect of the aroma and sweetness was unforgettable. We have also tried jasmine, which is just fantastic."

In rather typical style, Lavazza has created yet another new spoon for the product. A few years ago it devised the spoon with a hole in it for espresso

so foam, and the new one has an enlarged hole so that the essence can be stirred gently into a straight espresso without disturbing the crema.

In the UK, Lavazza will launch this month inside Harrod's with its Espresso cafe, which already has sites in Belfast and Turin. Going into 'the top people's shop' has involved some delicacies of design.

"Harrod's is a very peculiar institution, with very strong requirements, so we must work to fit in with them," said Giuseppe Lavazza tactfully.

The usual large Espresso wall panels, typically from Lavazza calendars, will stay – indeed, Harrod's demanded them. However, other details, such as the distinctive red Lavazza squiggle on table tops, have had to go.

"Italian café design is still generally popular in Britain," remarked Giuseppe Lavazza philosophically. "It is a 'retro' thing - styles from the past become icons, and Italian retro is an easy thing to understand and enjoy."

"This is why we use shapes and features which are recognisable from the 60s. It is not just an intellectual exercise, but a warm look which can be used, every day. Italian retro is a great image – cool, but not cold!"



An Espresso retro stool

**The Bath Coffee Festival will be bigger in 2011 – the organisers have increased the marquee size by 800 sq.m. It is likely that there will be visitors from farther afield this year, following interest from coach companies who are interested in running trips to the event; the Festival will also be promoted by the First Great Western train company, and the Bath city centre manager is working on providing links for shoppers from the retail areas to the event site.**

An early look at the exhibitor list (six months ahead!) shows that Taylor's of Harrogate are again main supporters, with coffee represented by Sea Island (the company which sources from unusual and exotic locations), Carwardine, Lavazza, Lazy Jose and several others.

Tea is strongly involved, with Cup of Tea (that's the Ronnefeldt brand, which

is the one which created the gold Tea Master badge seen on staff in some of the world's classiest hotels), Teapigs, and Tregothnan (the only UK tea plantation).

Taylorson's Malmesbury Syrups, which has just produced its latest market survey on coffee flavourings, will be there again.



## Barista lights and new tampers

Stuart Menges of Universal EspressoCare, in Farnborough, has come up with a quite surprising series of espresso-related items – not least of which is a new line in barista tampers.

Creating a new range of tampers can be a daunting prospect – the more opinionated baristas can get quite heated about the properties of what, to others, is a fairly basic item.

"I can agree about barista coming to blows over the whole design shenanigan!" he told us. "We want to provide a high-grade flat-bottom tamper that is produced to tight tolerances, but equally a real heavyweight so as to aid the whole tamping process. Our tampers have the added advantage of being made from recycled stainless steel, and recycled aluminium.

"We have chosen an anodised finish to enable us to laser-etch the client's logo if they wish - the tampers start at about £25, and engraving is an additional £6."

An interesting new service is an adaptation to Anfirm grinders, adding a timer.

"The concept commonly known as 'grind-on-demand' means that you grind only what is needed, to ensure that every cup is fresh. However, the Anfirm has a slower RPM, with larger than usual burrs, so as not to burn the coffee during the grinding process.

"The concept of modifying the Anfirm grinders is to give a consistent grind time."

(The importer of Anfirm, Capital Coffee of Wimbledon, has observed that an added timer is available from Anfirm direct, and that these feature 'the best timers in the world', accurate to one hundredth of a second – which, he says, may be more precise than many cafes need).



An engraved tamper

Stuart Menges has also offered a range of barista lights (pictured, top) which are more than just cosmetic.

"We have created a simple-to-fit kit that requires minimal effort or technical skill. The whole idea is to illuminate the cupping area of the drip tray, so as to enable the barista to have a proper look at the pour.

"It also provides a welcome added illumination for some of the more dimly-lit cafes that are popping up today!"



## Coffee sacks hit high fashion

Several roasters have turned coffee sacks into bags just to see if it can be done, but the first serious commercial move appears to have come from Lost Property of London, which has created an entire range of totes and carriers 'for those with conscience and an eye for style'. They are on sale in such fashion stores as Liberty in London.

Elsewhere, Starbucks' store interiors are to be decorated with a new kind of covering called 'WoJo', which in marketing-speak is described as 'a revolutionary upcycled fabric'.

From what we can gather, this was created by British and New Zealand weavers, blending old coffee sacks with New Zealand strong wool.

It was first shown in UK Wool Week, which has just passed, and we are told that The Campaign for Wool, in which the Prince of Wales is involved, has recognised Starbucks and the fabric designer with an award for Sustainable Product Innovation.

## Economic think-tank says Fairtrade must 'show some humility'

The latest anti-Fairtrade report has suggested that the Fairtrade Foundation should stop criticising all market models other than its own, and accept that its role is simply that of one niche player in the market. The views come in the report *Fair Trade without the Froth*, published by the Institute of Economic Affairs, which is unusual among such works in that while being critical, it does have some nice things to say about Fairtrade... although the kindest remark is that 'at its current level of penetration, Fairtrade is likely to do little harm in terms of distorting markets'.

Unusually, the IEA suggests that multi-nationals such as Starbucks, Kraft and Nestlé may possibly do more for developing-world coffee farmers than the Fairtrade Foundation, which it describes as 'costly, opaque and substantially unproven'.

Fairtrade does bring some benefits, acknowledges the report – 'but not as great as many of Fairtrade's proponents imply', says the IEA, adding that 'the benefits of Fairtrade also come at a cost... the certification charge starts at £1,570 in the first year, a huge sum of money for producers in the poorest countries.' There is also the associated charge that Fairtrade does not focus on the poorest countries, but on middle-income producers.

The IEA also repeats a claim made by other critics of the Foundation, saying that while Fairtrade does offer opportunities for some producers and workers in developing countries to benefit in terms of income generation, that: 'the net premium actually received by producers is lower than is commonly perceived'.

Some other familiar views are that

Fairtrade's own criticisms of other market practices 'are not helpful and distort realities', and that 'Fairtrade's proponents need to show some humility and accept that it is a niche market designed to benefit some producers'.

Most strongly, the IEA says: "The Fairtrade promotional campaigns tend to convey the impression that free trade is inherently inequitable and anything not carrying the Fairtrade mark is unfairly traded. This is inherently wrong... the advocates of Fairtrade would do well to recognise its speciality market characteristics and not pitch it as a counterweight to the so-called evils of free market international trade.

"The representation in promotional materials of a few particular farmers who have benefited from Fairtrade is unconvincing against a background of one billion people in absolute poverty."

The full report is available on PDF - the Editor can provide a copy.

Next year's Fairtrade Fortnight will be themed 'show off your label', in an attempt to get Fairtrade enthusiasts to show their loyalty to the movement.

Colin Harmon, the well-known Dublin barista, has created a clever idea in offering barista classes as Christmas gifts - the giver gets a voucher to hand over, and the recipient can take their course any morning in January or February.

Coffee Republic has signed a franchise deal for fifteen sites in Cyprus; it has opened in Kuwait University, and will also open eight-teen bars in high-value shopping locations across South Africa.

Yorkshire Tea is beginning its third Wallace & Gromit Great British Tea Party campaign. More than a million packs will contain coasters and cut-outs, and encourage consumers to hold charity tea parties.

Nine out of ten people do not know the fat content of a glass of semi-skimmed milk, says the Dairy Council. In a poll of 3,000 people for the Make Mine Milk campaign, 86 per cent did not guess the fat content of semi-skimmed to the nearest ten per cent. One in ten thought semi-skimmed contained more than 50 per cent fat - the figure is two per cent.

Roaster-retailing at the Grafton St site of Bewley's of Dublin contributed to the company's profits of 1.6m euros, on a turnover of 72 million euros. Managing director Jim Corbett told us: "We have focussed on the development of a coffee quality culture, and all our baristas now roast coffees which are available in the shop."

# the brew group

commercial coffee equipment suppliers to the trade

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The Indulgence coffee lounge in Uttoxeter has won Most Promising New Start-up Business at the Burton Mail Business Awards, and also took runner-up spot in the Business Performance section of the same awards.

The public is being asked to nominate their favourite Scottish tea-room/café, as part of Scotland's Year of Food and Drink, 2011. The nominated venues will form part of Visit Scotland's Spring/Summer promotions and will be publicised to visitors across the UK. It is said that sixty per cent of tourists visit a café, coffee-house or tearoom when on holiday in the country, while £1 in every £5 spent by Scotland's visitors is on food and drink. Meanwhile, in Cambridge, the owner of the By Jove! tea room in Burwell is to stage a 'protest' outside her own premises, and raise a petition to send to the Visit Britain organisation, aimed at reinstating the traditional habit of sitting down at 4pm, come what may, for a cup of tea.

Worldwide sales of espresso brand Nespresso grew by 20 per cent last year, and were particularly strong in its biggest European markets.

UK charity Computer Aid has completed its first solar-powered cyber café designed for isolated communities - it was built inside a shipping container, and was sent to Zambia to provide the community with internet access through Africa's largest rural Wi-Fi network.

Latest contender for the title of 'highest coffee shop in the UK' is the Cafe in the Clouds in the Spinnaker, Portsmouth - it's 105 metres high, in the UK's tallest publicly-accessible tower.

The Chocolate Café in Ramsbottom has been voted 'Best Family-friendly Venue' in Manchester, during the city's food and drink festival.

The Greystones coffee house and art gallery at Glenridding, on the shores of Ullswater, has been sold off an asking price of £495,000. The new owners are Mal Thomas and Sonia Clarke of Merseyside.

A fascinating item in the international press recently involved the idea that Starbucks has told its baristas to slow down. The Wall St Journal said that the chain's reputation has come to have 'all the romance of an assembly line', and so the order has been given to make no more than two drinks at a time, and steam milk separately for each drink. Baristas who

are used to 'working the line' techniques have complained that the result has been longer queues. When the Journal put this complaint to Starbucks, the spokesman said: "we don't have that level of detail..."

The research company Mintel says that coffee consumption is higher among the middle-aged and older generations - the research says that demand is strongest among those over 45, and the fastest-growing demographic by consumption are the over-55s. By contrast, while 40 per cent of 18-24 year olds think that coffee improves their cognitive function, only about a quarter drink it every day. "Young adults are more likely to associate negative health consequences with coffee consumption," quences with coffee consumption," said the analyst involved. "If coffee companies can't convert these younger drinkers to everyday users, long-term growth may suffer."

Great improvements have been made in the salt content of coffee-shop foods, according to the CASH organisation (Consensus Action on Salt and Health). The average salt content of muffins and pastries has been reduced by a quarter. However, when the group surveyed items from six high-street businesses, all the big names, it concluded that a hot drink and a piece of cake can still contain nearly as much salt as five packets of crisps, and amount to more than a third of the maximum recommended daily salt intake. The organisation criticises coffee shops for a lack of nutritional information on-pack and in-store, which they say makes it difficult for consumers to choose healthier options.

Soho Coffee of Cheltenham has found a new outlet for its branded cafes - it is going to open inside a Butlins holiday centre at Minehead. Soho now has 21 sites, nine of which are company-run and a dozen franchised, including a couple in Spanish airports. It opened inside Next in Manchester during the first week of November.

Ethical Addictions of Gloucester, which has been working with coffee farmers in Africa for six years, has its first shipment of coffee bought direct from farmers in Brazil. The company already supplies both catering and home-user customers, and says it continues to look for trade customers who 'want to partner with us to aid smaller producers and have a connection to the real story behind every cup their customers drink'. Details: [www.eacoffee.co.uk](http://www.eacoffee.co.uk)

## Tri-Star takes on the inventor of safer beverage carriers...

Tri-Star has acquired the PortaBrands company and says that the deal will bring to the takeaway beverage trade the products of the UK's two most innovative packaging suppliers.

PortaBrands is the company which has created many ideas for the safe handling of drinks of all kinds, and its products are already seen in the café trade with the use of the PortaDrink carrier by some of the major names.

The founder of PortaBrands, Ian Bates, has said that his company was created to develop products which would help people eat and drink safely and comfortably on the move, while being based on 'cradle-to-cradle' sustainability principles, designed to reach the best solutions for ease of use, reuse and disposability.

The PortaDrink was invented as an alternative to the pulp tray used for coffee take-away sales and is made from unbleached kraft paperboard sourced from sustainable forests. The principle was then extended into take-away carriers which will handle pint



A PortaBrand carrier

beer mugs, bottles, and various snacks, and the PortaTray four-cup brandable tray, which will split into two two-cup trays and is promoted as 'the most versatile multi-cup/bottle tray in the world'.

The company has also developed PortaBio, a range of sustainable, biodegradable and compostable laminates to replace oil-based metalised polyester paperboard laminate packaging.

## ...and general foodservice packaging gets new recognition

Elsewhere in the packaging trade, Huhtamaki, the cup company, and Nescafe are among the sponsors of a new awards programme described as the foodservice industry's first-ever recognition of contributions to sustainability and environmental excellence.

The Footprint awards, say the organisers, will 'show customers, competitors and the industry that you are taking environmental issues seriously'. There are eleven categories, most of which are the expected ones about



'best use of natural resources', and sourcing, but there is also the British Supply award, which requires entrants to show how buying British has brought benefit to the environment and the sustainability of the supply source.

There are also categories to show how cost savings or business advantage have been achieved through sustainability, and for the best work in achieving consumer understanding about sustainable practice.

## Councils still confused on outside seats

The matter of charges for outside tables and chairs continues, with mixed experiences in different towns. In Melton, 2,500 people have signed a petition calling on the local authority to change its policy and charges on pavement cafes. The petition was to be sent to the council leader and to the Communities Secretary Eric Pickles complaining that 'unnecessary and expensive over-regulation' is going to kill off the very cafe culture which the council had previously encouraged.

A £300 licence fee is to be introduced from January. The Melton Mowbray Food Partnership said that local businesses had supported the council by investing in high quality street furniture to enhance the atmosphere in the town, but by imposing charges, the local council would kill off its own aims over a very small amount of money.

In Northamptonshire, residents of Stanwick planned a sit-down coffee morning protest in support of the local café, which was ordered to remove its chairs even though they had been proposed in a recent parish plan. The village residents even suggested complaining direct to the Prime Minister, referring to his recent admiration for 'communities with oomph' and canvassing his support.

However, the local authority in Halton, near Widnes has halved the cost of street dining licences. Under the scheme, food and drink outlets in Runcorn and Widnes town centres have to pay £135.75 for a fresh licence and £35.75 for a renewal. The licences require that tables and chairs 'are beneficial for customers' and do not pose an obstacle for pedestrians on the street.



Here's a curiosity that might be profitable in the Christmas gift market - Scrabble mugs and espresso cups. The espresso set of four (spelling 'cafe') retails at £24.95. The mugs feature the entire Scrabble alphabet. The source is Graham & Green, and the trade contact number is 020 8987 3752.

The UK's only maker of espresso machines is opening a new factory - and it is barely a hundred yards from the existing one, because the company refuses to leave its home in the middle of the overalls-and-dirty-hands area.

Fracino comes from the workshop of the world, the engineering district of Birmingham, just up from the Aston Villa football ground. The companies around here are not glitzy - you are likely to walk straight from the road into a metal-bashing workshop, which tends to disconcert those who are impressed by flashy marketing and palatial reception areas.

Is it fair to suggest that Fracino's image, which comes from its down-to-earth approach, is the reason that it is not taken as seriously as certain bigger-brand espresso machines? The UK's only maker is simply not spoken of in the same terms as any brand name which starts with 'La'.

The comparison entertains managing director Adrian Maxwell... up to a point. He may not have the stylish Italian image, he says firmly, but he has the business.

"Are we really seen as less influential than the Italian brands? Well, we're the strongest brand in the UK, that's for certain - that's one hell of a statement to make, but we know it.

"We sell more traditional espresso machines than all the others put together. I know the figures, I know all the lies, and I know that some companies' claims are just impossible codswallop. Me and my dad are production engineers, we know the other factories, and we know what they can do.

"We know which importers are reaching 250 sales a year, which is very good, and we know which get over a hundred. We see averages for a lot of brands of about 50-60 machines a year.

"Our own turnover and output have gone up - we will sell 2,000 machines this year, and we work through 700 distributors... although of course some only buy one or two a year.

"We talk to all our competitors, because we have no enemies, and one big Italian brand told us that they refer to England as 'Fracino-country'! So our true status is probably that of a big thorn in everybody else's side."

A lot of Fracino's business is in export. The company has quite deliberately worked on a twin strategy of bringing as much manufacturing in-house as possible, thus competing against the cost of imported equipment and parts, and of using a weak pound to compete in selling abroad.

It is not an entirely new strategy - the companies in this engineering district have always worked closely together in swapping technology and sub-contracting to each other, but Fracino has recently concentrated on bringing as much expertise as possible under its own roof.

"When you are a manufacturing engineer, your situation changes enormously," argues Adrian Maxwell. "We know margins for a lot of importers and distributors have been chopped to the bone, but specialist engineering is doing pretty well, and there's a lot of work around. Since the euro collapsed, we have become particularly competitive, and those importers who were bringing in machines from Italy by the handful now find they have no advantage over us, and they still have all the hassle of dealing with Europe.

"We are classic engineers, in the best engineering city in the world. There is nothing that you can't get done around here, which is why we now make spare parts for so many other companies who find that it is just far quicker and easier to get what they want from us without all the problems of importing. We've already pinched a lot of business because of this, and we always gain a lot when Spain and Italy close

# Coffee machines in the workshop of the world



Adrian Maxwell

**Fracino says that its workmanlike approach produces sales figures that the glitzy brands would enjoy**

down for their holidays!

"More than 80 per cent of our own machines are now made in-house. Only some items which are generic to all machines still come from Italy."

But if Fracino is not spoken of in the same awe as the Italian brands - how good are they?

They are creative dirty-handed engineers, and proud of it, comes the answer.

"I've been working on espresso machines for forty years now," says Adrian, "and too many people who are just importing and selling them don't really understand how they work. We have taken many imported brands apart, and we can see a lot that aren't eco-friendly, and a lot that are just over-complicated - engineers say they like ours because they can get at everything easily.

"And where the Italians and the Spanish build for a lifespan, we build for longevity."

Fracino has come in for some questioning over its diversification. Its strength was first seen in one-



*The Fracino Piccino - the domestic machine solid enough to not skid across a kitchen worktop!*

group and two-group traditional machines, and then it dared to bring out a counter-top roasting machine, and last year developed its first bean-to-cup machine, the Cybercino. This all drew some disbelief - if other companies have devoted their working lives to roasters or bean-to-cup technology, how come the Maxwells think they can just come in and start making them?

"I know it appears that we wake up and think 'I'll build a bean-to-cup today', but the truth is that the Cybercino took six years - the testing alone went on for three years.

"The story behind it was that a customer said 'can you make me a bean-to-cup which looks like an espresso machine, and which is reliable?' We had early troubles with it because we didn't want plastic parts in it, and because when we bought in a standard milk frother, we were so unhappy with it that we decided to stop and make our own. We also had a few problems with pistons and seals, and we had some software problems - now, we have it running properly, but we put a lot of time into it."

A lot of work also went into one of Maxwell's favourite subjects, the gas-powered espresso machine for the mobile trade.

"This is a great subject! It all came about from someone saying they wished they could find a reliable espresso machine for a mobile cart. One of the companies we work with round here is a gas expert, and they made us up a prototype burner. We put it into an espresso machine box and thought 'wow, this is powerful!' We took it to the proper authorities for approval and certification, and now it's a stock line and we ship all over the world - it's very big in Africa and the middle east, and a lot go to France.

"There is also one big British chain who want to go mobile, because they have an eye on football grounds and the like, and they think ours will be the machine to go with."

Although the vast majority of Fracino's business is in two-group commercial espresso machines, it has made a useful name in small non-plumbed machines.

"It was the late 90s before we began with the no-plumbing single-groups. They came about because of questions from hotels and pubs, bed-and-breakfasts and small tea-rooms, and distributors in holiday areas have done very well for us. A little one-group in a tea-room gets them into decent coffee for £650, and when they see small machines elsewhere for up to £2,500, they think this is fine.

"I've come to believe that a lot is being paid for those other 'big' names."

When the new production plant opens, it is a small machine which will occupy the existing building. The old factory will turn to the new domestic machine, the Piccino, for which the first batch went on the line in November.

"This has cost £100,000 in tooling alone, because frankly, the great problem with domestic espresso machines is that so many of them are naff! They have small boilers, and they can't cope with brewing and making steam at the same time. We said - what if we can make a machine with a full-size solid brass boiler and group, which runs on a 13-amp plug, has a water filter inside, will steam and brew at the same time, looks the part, and retails at £499?

"This is a solid machine - we have made the domestic machine which won't skid across your kitchen worktop."

The UK has, as most of the coffee world knows, produced two world champions in recent years. In spite of that, the UK barista championship is most certainly not a contest for the big coffee brands – so the big question for the 2011 event is, who are the great new baristas who will appear from the independent high street cafes?

As the entry lists for the next event open, we still do not know whether many of the familiar contestants from independent cafes will be seen. Reigning British champ John Gordon has told us that he is currently very busy and so is still thinking about it, but we do know that one regular competitor in previous years, but who has taken a couple of years off from competing, will be back – this is Ed Buston of Clifton Coffee, who has achieved a third place in the past, and will be making his fifth attempt for the British title (he does already have a national title – he's the Good Spirits champion, for coffee and alcohol cocktail-making).

# Who are our new stars?

It's time for the annual test of British speciality coffee – the UK barista championships. The big names may enter this year... but the winners have almost always been independent cafe owners!

We always hope that the big coffee chains will put an official entrant in for the national contest – it is virtually unheard-of, but a couple of their staff baristas have been known to enter privately. This year, Costa's MD has already confirmed to us that he will again not do so. ("Not winning would be too much to bear!" he added with great good humour).

However, some other groups and chains will be taking the chance to put themselves up against the rest of the speciality coffee trade. The mobile franchise Cafe2U will be re-entering its in-house champ, Steve Dyson of Barnsley, and the Esquires coffee house chain has yet to complete its own internal contest, but expects to have several entries.

From the 'giant' sector away from the high street, it is notable that Caffe Ritazza, the big travel-site operator, expects to put four baristas in.

At this early stage, the biggest single entry away from the high street looks to be coming from the blue-chip corporate caterer Baxter Storey, who told *Coffee House* that they may enter a dozen of their best baristas.

This just shows how much catering in corporate offices has progressed with its coffee, says training director Graham Everleigh.

"In corporate catering, our clients have the expectations of high-street branded coffee quality, and we have to match that. There are certain sensitivities which mean that a corporate client may not actually want a high-street brand in their own site, but we still have to match that level of quality."

Baxter Storey may possibly have been the first contract caterer to open an in-house barista academy.

"We reckon we have between six and eight hundred people who count as baristas, but the figure isn't precise because there is a lot of dual-role working."

"We see barista contests as a way of celebrating the standard of our baristas. We have people who are eager, who have come up to a standard, and who are excited about what they do, so we had about sixty entries to our own contest. Our UKBC entries will mainly come from our internal winners, but as several new staff have come along since then, we have given them all the chance - I expect we will enter twelve, in heats across the country."

Baxter Storey's current champ is Joao Almeida from the Barclays building in Canary Wharf. As the seventh-



Joao Almeida

biggest skyscraper in the UK, it's a very high-volume site, and is thought to be the biggest coffee-turnover business in the area.

"We now use Joao as a trainer and mentor for the rest of the business - it has become important to be able to show someone with such a profile. He goes round other client sites, and we achieve a lot of customer recognition.... We make it quite clear that there is someone special behind the coffee bar that day!"

The Baxter Storey entrants will use Down to Earth espresso from United Coffee, although the precise blend is their own specification.

Joao's signature drink has been the Vera Cruz, a combination of espresso and dark chocolate with a hint of raspberry, served with bars of dark chocolate encased in edible gold leaf.

Every year, the contest organisers stress that baristas from the UK's independent coffee houses are genuinely welcomed, and several British champs have been one-site owner-operators.

To encourage this, Caffe Society of Leeds ran an interesting 'street-level' contest in 2009, to encourage everyday working baristas to accept that they really are good enough to stand up against the best in the land, and that the UK championships are not an elite contest. There was not such a contest this year, but the



Will there be a flavour trend in this year's signature drinks? This is the Vera Cruz by Joao of Baxter Storey - espresso, chocolate, raspberry... and gold leaf!

idea will return.

"We will probably revive our street-level contest in 2011," Caffe Society's Steve Mooring told us. "We think our last one made a big contribution to street-level barista skills – what the UKBC does in pushing boundaries is very good, but we also think that the baristas who get to the top of that contest are the top half of a per cent of the barista community. We need to make the other 99.5 per cent of baristas know that they are appreciated, and not forgotten!"

Entry details for the UK barista championship, and details of regional events, can be found at [www.scaeuk.com](http://www.scaeuk.com)

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The London heat is at the end of January; the south-west is Exeter on Feb 1-3, the midland heat is in Lincoln on Feb 9, and the Scottish heat on Feb 14. The north-western heat will be in Lancaster on Feb 17th, and the Northern Ireland one is not as yet set.

There are always regional curiosities - the Northern Ireland event was full of very good baristas for several years, but last year did not run for lack of interest; by contrast, the London event failed to attract any interest for a few years, but last year came back very strongly indeed.

Something to be watched will be any trend in the coffees and flavours used this year, says UKBC chairman John Sherwood.

"The winners and finalists now tend to make up their own blends, or indeed now micro-roast their own. We also see changing fashions in coffee taste - it has gone to straight single-origin espressos, and towards fruity, acidic coffees. It will be interesting to see if this continues - there certainly is a feeling that espresso should have other qualities in addition to acidity."

Many coffees used by competitors are specially blended by two or three of the leading artisan roasters - but this, says Sherwood, should not put any other entrant off.

"We think the number of baristas competing in in-house competitions is a great thing, and of course they will all be using their house blends... and you can do a lot with a decent house blend."

The judges are often more cautious about what flavours will crop up in entrants' signature drinks. These too often go in trends, for no apparent reason.

"Ah yes - we've had fashions for chilli, garlic, rose, and heaven-knows-what. There was no flavour trend last year, but some flavours did stand out - John Gordon's fantastic apple-crumble coffee was something you could smell on its way to the judges' table!"

## The independent champ moves on



Probably the most notable British champ of recent years has been Gwilym Davies, the market-stall barista who took the British title and went straight on to become world champion.

Gwilym continues to be a street-level coffee revolutionary - most recently, worrying that too much complacency is back in the coffee market, he has said that he will now only serve drinks in sizes of 4/6/8oz.

He has also ditched the flat cap he was known for wearing, because it was becoming 'too much of a trade-mark', and scrapped his 'disloyalty card', a co-operative scheme promoting a small number of high-quality coffee shops, after the idea was copied elsewhere. Gwilym did recently threaten a new idea, of a loyalty card promoting only cafes who pay baristas more than the London minimum wage, but was told it was 'too antagonistic'.

The next likely move from this unconventional and independent champ is a new cafe, which will celebrate the London coffee scene with an exhibition of photos of other top quality coffee places in the area.

Gwilym's example proves that any independent cafe barista can make his mark!

## Send your team along to Union's fun

Union Hand-Roasted, who will be hosting the London regional event, will be hosting two preparatory evenings. Although these are formally entitled 'competition workshops', the company is also using the familiar trade term of 'barista jam' to highlight the all-inclusive element of their work.

"Barista jams are not formal or scary - they're fun!" says Union's Alan Miler. "We have run them before, and as well as independent operators, we have even had baristas from Costa, who were very welcome."

"Our first event will be a 'do's and do-nots of the UKBC', which will be tips and insights from those who have competed before... things the rule book doesn't tell you, like remembering the tablecloth!"

"Although a contest is not a walk in the park, and we believe an entrant does need some preparation, we also believe that there is interest in this for every barista. The everyday high-street barista has just as much a passion for coffee as the geeks who think they know everything, and our ethos is to encourage everyone who's interested... come and brew some of our single origins as well, if you like!"

"These events are free of charge. We believe it would be wrong to set a charge and put off a small business who might want to send four baristas along for experience."

Details: 020 474 8990

# Don't compromise



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It has long been trade lore that flavoured syrups are an Italian invention, which were introduced to coffee through an American travelling salesman.

They are nothing of the kind, says the Monin company – flavoured syrups are a French tradition, and although they were originally used to flavour children's drinks, they still survive today in a concept which, to a Briton, seems unimaginable.

In the French countryside, bars still stock fruit syrups so that customers can flavour their beer. The bars in Bourges, by the Monin plant, think nothing of offering light beers with raspberry, peach, or strawberry flavouring.

"That's not unusual," laughs Olivier Monin. "It is an old product, for flavouring anything but coffee. It has always been an ingredient to flavour water. A very famous beer in Mexico is always drunk with a slice of lime; Britain has long drunk lager with lime.

"In my grandfather's day, in almost every small town, the wine merchants had a line of lemonades and would add not-very-sophisticated syrups. Most of these guys died in the 70s.

"In grandfather's day we made our syrups from fruit. Now it's from concentrates, and the skill is in choosing the best, and blending. So, our cost of materials is greater than anyone else - our competitors just buy 'a vanilla', but the differences in vanillas is immense - and the cost difference between a hundred-per-cent artificial, and a hundred-per-cent natural is also one hundred per cent!

"We will never use artificial flavour, but we will use some 'nature identical' if the natural flavour is not strong enough - for example, natural kiwi juice has no taste, so you have to boost it."

At one point, flavour companies seemed to be bringing out ever more flavours just for the sake of it. Now, Monin has brought out an entirely new flavouring puree which is as yet not entirely understood.

"At 120 flavours, people did think we had done the lot - and then we were asked for forty more! Some of our flavours are very good but have no application - one of these was a tomato syrup which was perfect, but for which we could not find a single application.

"We have learned a great deal from the needs of bartenders. In the UK, the flavoured coffee market has become very aggressive, and it is the coffee people who have asked us many things. So the puree came from requests for more fruit and less sugar.

"We can't really call it a puree, because although it has much less sugar than a syrup, there is still sugar in it. The taste may be almost the same as the syrup, but the sensation is different. This product will take time - it has to be demonstrated by a professional, because it is so pure that a barista can taste it by itself and not like it! It will take time, but in the next five years, we expect we shall do as many purees as syrups."

The real value of it, says UK distributor Will Opie, is in the intensity of flavour. "The idea is a product which can be stored at ambient temperature, has a high fruit content, and has a four-week life once opened.

"Match a strawberry milkshake made with the puree against one made with a syrup, and the sensation is

# Don't be afraid to try new flavours!



Head of the French flavour family - Olivier Monin

extremely different, so it works extremely well in smoothie applications. At the 'what to give the kids' market, you certainly get unique flavours which you don't get from cheaper syrups.

"A puree blended with yoghurt is a product which really makes the customer feel they've got value for money. This is a way to be ahead of anyone else - this is the way to have signature smoothies which will stand up against anything. It is of course half as much again in price, at £6 a litre against £4.50 for a syrup, but the result produces a higher selling price."

(Curiously, going back to the French roots, it also works in beer - "red berry puree will go with Guinness," says Monin. "It is a very new texture, velvet on the palate. Put the Fruits de Monin in the glass, add half the Guinness and stir, and then the rest. You can do the same with champagne, and you get a very even texture.")

Right now, says Monin, the valuable thing for the café trade is in thinking about how flavours can help make the most of the winter season. Several syrups are already familiar, such as the nut ones and gingerbread, but Monin's creative expert Stephane Moesle says that an imaginative coffee house can achieve some different speciality drinks very easily.

Monin has also come up with some unusual flavours - the apple pie, chocolate cookie, and crème brulee flavours.

"When we launched gingerbread to one of the coffee chains, their idea was purely to get something

better than the Starbucks gingerbread latte - this is why the UK chains are so important to us. They are so competitive!

"Now, we have spoken of a Christmas Pudding flavour; shortbread will probably be launched. There's already a speculoo flavour.

"I think when you drink a flavoured coffee, the interest is in flavours which ring a bell with you, such as remembering that when you were a kid, you had chocolate cookies. So we now have a chocolate cookie syrup.

"Costa had a wonderful success last year with the crème brulee. I have even used it for a crème brulee martini - chocolate sauce, crème brulee syrup, white rum, and milk, all shaken on ice. With the crème brulee latte, you garnish with brown sugar to replicate the crisp topping.

"The apple pie latte garnish is cinnamon. We tested this with Costa Coffee in the UK, although they have decided to stick with crème brulee for this year - but Costa Middle East have decided to run with an apple pie latte!"

Hot chocolate is the second ideal product for winter flavouring, says Stephane.

"Drinking chocolate is more and more popular, and I would flavour it with a cherry, or a chestnut, a triple-sec, or a frosted mint and a tangerine syrup... and coconut and banana purees are good.

"Use a chocolate sauce, then the puree, and top with the hot milk - the advantage of making hot chocolate with sauce is that you keep your milk white. You can use a sauce instead of a chocolate powder, because there is more variety, and it is more 'gourmet'. The top coffee shops certainly wanted something 'thicker.'"

Some flavours work surprisingly well with chocolate, and not just the strong ones.

"Mango and passion fruit are not too mild for a hot chocolate. I really like chocolate mint for a winter drink.

"The problem with citrus is that it can curdle in steamed milk - but the triple-sec syrup does not. Chocolate first, then the espresso, then the milk flavoured with triple-sec, steamed together."

A favourite Monin winter idea is a traditional but unexpected one.

"A good winter idea is... grog! The basic grog is rum, hot water, and a slice of lemon. Rum first, then the syrup, then top with tea, and garnish with lime. You need to warm the rum, so you can use the steam arm of the espresso machine. Just an ordinary teabag... if you want to, add chestnut or triple sec. I would present grog in a latte glass with a handle... £2.99 sounds reasonable."



When using the newly-popular Monin syrups for winter drinks, such as the apple pie (left) and the crème brulee (far right), remember to use the correct garnish for each - cinnamon on the apple pie, and brown sugar for the crispness of the crème brulee



Use a chocolate sauce for your chocolate winter drinks, suggests Stephane Moesle (left). The advantage of making hot chocolate with sauce is that there is more variety, it is more 'gourmet', and fits the demand of top coffee chains for something 'thicker'.



The inclination of consumers to try a flavour in their coffee continues to increase, reports John Taylerson of Malmesbury Syrups.

This is probably the only flavour company to perform consumer surveys – or the only one to make its results public – and the latest work was undertaken by an independent research company who questioned a survey base which was almost twice as large as the previous one, in 2009.

In all, the researchers found that 67 per cent of those questioned had tried a flavour with their coffee in the past year. This was quite considerably up, by 16 per cent from 2009. Females had tried syrups far more than men, their figure increasing by 26 per cent against 16 per cent for men.

An interesting finding from the previous survey was almost exactly repeated – the main users of flavours are almost equally divided between the four main age sectors between 16 and 55, with about 67-70 per cent of these people having tried a flavoured coffee in the past year, but quite noticeably, the consumption figure does not go down that much among the older generations. The figures for both the over-55s and over-65s show that over forty per cent of each sector told the researchers that they had tried a flavoured coffee in the past year.

The most enthusiastic users of flavours are the Londoners and those in the central southern counties, while the lowest users of flavours are in Yorkshire, closely followed by the borders and Scotland.

## Flavour usage up in 2010, reports Taylerson survey



The Cream Supplies Christmas pack, featuring a Taylerson syrup.

There were no surprises at all in consumers' choices of flavours – vanilla and caramel returned the expected top scores, but overall there was a distinct preference for mocha chocolatey flavours.

Elsewhere, the Coffee Nation company has also reported a big use of syrups in its award-winning self-serve machine (reported on our front page).

"We are the first to bring flavour syrups and signature drinks to a self-serve format," managing director Scott Martin told us. "Take-up rates are extremely high, with one in five coffees sold going with a flavour. I believe this is because customers can privately

experiment by customizing their own coffee, rather than facing the intimidation of a busy barista!"

Elsewhere, flavoured syrup figures in one of the more interesting Christmas gift packs offered to the trade this year. The pack from wholesaler Cream Supplies features an AeroPress, a bottle of Taylerson's syrup, and a pack of triple-certified coffee from Coffee Plant, which is run by author/roaster Ian Henshall in west London. This combination acknowledges the rarely-mentioned fact that while most flavoured syrups are sold with espresso drinks, they can complement great filter coffees very well.

## Starbucks claims a big move in cup recycling

Starbucks has completed a six-week cup-to-cup pilot recycling program in Canada and America.

Starbucks collected 6,000 pounds of used paper cups in the Toronto area and sent them to Mississippi, for the only pulp mill in the USA that has successfully recycled used cups into fibre suitable for making new cups.

International Paper turned the recycled cup fibre into new cups, but told the *New York Times* cautiously that this was only a very early project, and that they have not even looked at the costs of such work.

However, Starbucks claimed that the project was 'a milestone'. Starbucks has begun another pilot project in New York, collecting paper cups at 86 stores to see if they can be recycled into bath tissue and paper towels; a further pilot in Chicago is to test to recycling paper cups into napkins.

In the UK, Pret A Manger is to test KeepCup, promoted as 'the first barista-standard plastic re-usable cup'. The company is looking to reduce the 250 million disposable cups it uses every year. The KeepCup was designed and created by a Glasgow-born sister and brother, and will be made in the UK. Pret will be offering 10p off every coffee in a reusable KeepCup, to persuade consumers to try the idea.

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There are always some things you can be certain of at an Allegra symposium - most notably, that at least one speaker from one of the industry's very biggest names will be less than brilliant, and that several speakers will pad out their presentations with video presentations of meaningful and atmospheric shots of customers in coffee bars and espresso shots dripping into cups.

One of the big problems of major companies invited to speak at coffee summits is that they spend too much time telling us how wonderful they are. However, something you can also rely on is that a couple of speakers will pop up as the stars of the event, and they will generally come from the independent side of the trade, or the small-chain sector.

The stars came out early in Rome, with the second and third speakers of the day giving the most food for thought.

We had been warned to expect something unusual from Kaspar Basse, who runs the Joe and the Juice chain in Denmark, Sweden, and most recently, London. Those who were in the front rows will have identified the tattoo which runs right up his forearm - it's the company logo. When he played the now-obligatory company video, it was clear that his staff are of the same ilk - they are tee-shirted, hatted, tattooed, and generally boogie around their stores to the accompaniment of loud music. Yes, it's that kind of place.

What was entirely unexpected was that Kaspar proceeded to lead his audience entirely up the garden path with his presentation on 'innovation'. The question of the 'next generation of cafes' has been much spoken of in the coffee trade, and Kaspar cleverly wrong-footed his audience from his first words.

"The idea of the 'next generation' café is never going to happen," he said firmly. "It will never happen from the big players for three reasons - the corner sites are gone, and after the financial crisis, nobody will have the budget left. And the big players will say that they already do a super job of 'creating preference' and that people love their coffee.

"So the 'new generation' of cafes is a hypothetical situation. It would have to be something that doesn't exist."

But nevertheless, he asked, what would the new generation be?

"A hypothetical new player could focus on health. Maybe it could be new idea about design - all the existing players position their seats at the windows, so the customers can enjoy coffee and croissant and watch the street. But what if someone were to turn it all inwards, so the customers could focus on what's happening in the store?

"Perhaps we could have cubicles to encourage a little more dynamism and intimacy? What if we pumped up the music? We could make an everyday 'club', without the booze and the drugs

# It certainly isn't 'all about the coffee...'

**At this year's European Coffee Summit, it was the street-level operators who made the most sensible points about modern-day trade.**

**It always is, of course...**



"... and I realised it wasn't all about me!" Even as a world barista champ, Tim Wendelboe looked at himself, and realised he had got things wrong

and the bouncers and the trouble?"

What, he asked, if the staff could actually be seen making healthy fruit drinks right in front of the customers, clearly using and blending real fresh fruit, and juggling with the ingredients like cocktail barmen?

This, he remarked, brought the question of ambience to the fore, even over such considerations as food and drink.

"It's not all about the coffee," said

*"Interaction and ambience is more important than any product. This is what brings people back six times a week instead of once a month!"*

- Kaspar Basse



Kaspar, deliberately attacking one over-used trade cliché. "It's not about the sandwich. It's not about the juice!"

It is, he explained, about ambience. And part of that ambience involves the theatre of staff clearly making fruit drinks from scratch, beginning with real fruit.

"As a very early principle, I decided not to offer anything pre-made. We have seven sandwiches and a menu of juices, and we make them all in front of the customer. It is very demanding, but it motivates the guys behind the bar."

Larger players, he suggested, would probably complain that this practice could not offer speed in high footfall sites. It can, said Kaspar - and anyway, there may be a misconception about how long customers will wait.

"I see juice offered elsewhere - but the same concept of speed and efficiency doesn't seem to exist elsewhere. There's also a big difference between 'real' waiting time and 'perceived' waiting time. When people perceive action, in seeing how their drink and sandwich is being made for them,

then that actually gives us a little more time to prepare it.

"This interaction and the ambience is more important than any product. This is what brings people back six times a week instead of once a month!"

All this comes at a cost, he acknowledged - typically, a heavy investment on training. As a result, he expects that the biggest players will simply not consider going down such a route.

"Of course, all this would involve too much trouble, too much training time, and too high salary levels. So of course... the next generation of cafes won't happen!"

His point, of course, is that it already does happen - the situations he described were how Joe and the Juice works, and so the idea of a 'next generation' of cafes is an illusion.

For Kaspar, everybody else's 'next generation' amounts to what he is already doing.

The other star independent speaker on 'innovation' was Tim Wendelboe - a former world barista champion, and operator of his own roastery and coffee bar in Norway. No tattoos for Tim, and a far more laid-back approach, but equally revolutionary in his own way.

The course to innovation, he told the symposium, comes in having the nerve to question what you are used to doing, and the way you are used to doing it. He is a former world barista champion - but that wasn't the biggest step in his career.

"My defining moment was coming

**At the Allegra European summit, the research company presented some of the findings of its latest trade research document.**

**You can find them as a PDF file on this magazine's website, [www.coffee-house.org.uk](http://www.coffee-house.org.uk)**

second in the world barista championship!" he told a surprised audience.

"That's when I realised that I had to change. That's when I had to admit to myself that I didn't know everything. I realised that my coffee can always get better, and that I can always learn from other companies. I realised that you can always find inspiration from other companies, whatever their subject is."

It is too easy to concentrate on your own activity, he told his audience.

"The biggest mistake I ever made was thinking about myself. I was standing behind my bar thinking my business was 'all about me'.

"So I tried to visit all the best coffee shops, to ask: 'what are you doing?' You must always ask of other companies, why are they doing what they are? Then ask yourself - what if you do it differently?"

There are examples, he said, of big coffee brands who have done well by taking advice.

"One company is La Marzocco, when they created the Strada espresso machine. It means 'the street', and they created it from a group of people from the street who decided what they wanted an espresso machine to be. It is a machine the baristas wanted.

"This showed that even a big espresso machine company can admit they are not perfect, and there is something they can learn from others!"

However, said Wendelboe, being willing to learn from others does not simply mean that you must always copy successful players. It means that you must be willing to consider the various different ways of running a business, to help you reach a decision on your own direction - and then, when you have decided, in sticking to it.

And another likely mistake is in listening too much to the consumer!

"A lot of people tell me that I must do what the consumer wants... and I disagree. The customer does not know what they want, so you should stop lis-

tening to your customers all the time."

It is fairly common to hear of coffee-shop owners, particularly in America, who simply refuse to serve a customer who asks for something the barista thinks 'not right' - this, in the Wendelboe theory, is missing the big business point.

"For the customer, the perfect experience is not in giving them 'what they want'. What I do is tell the customer what they want - I tell them what is the best coffee. I tell them that there is coffee which tastes better than they know.

"If they tell me they want an Americano, I don't just send them away. I explain what we do, I explain how we make our coffees, and why I hope they will like it the way I will offer it to them... and ninety per cent of the time, we're right. I try to show the customer a different experience.

"This is the way to keep a customer for life."

Although intended to be speaking on the same subject of 'innovation', the MD of Costa, John Derkach, echoed Kaspar Basse in his sentiments about ambience in a café, and repeated points he has made before - notably, that a big chain can learn from its smaller rivals.

"By contrast with the global giants, what does distinguish us is a fierce sense of competitiveness."

This was a remarkable understatement, considering the promotional fights that Costa has had with Starbucks recently; however, Costa's promotional activity is known to be effective, and its support behind flat white, the chain's new coffee drink in thirty years, has lifted the drink to five per cent of sales within a year.

"What is the key to success? The quality of the environment in which the customers experience your product is vital - we won't have wi-fi, because we want people to enjoy the atmosphere." (In fact, some of the Costa franchisees did try it.)

There is, John Derkach appeared to concede, a difference between the staff talent of the chains and the independents, even though his training programme is a comprehensive one.

"We have the best people of any coffee chain - we have 17 training schools and 17,000 baristas, and every one enters our own barista contest.

"We cannot compete with the independents - but we can make our staff aspire to achieve that standard, and that is a point of difference for us."

In one of the day's most entertaining questions from the audience, someone asked why Costa still retains its massive soup-bowl cup size for coffees.

"I wish we didn't," responded Derkach with quite typical candour. "But the customers want it, and it makes up 15 per cent of our sales.

"But from a personal point of view - I don't like it."

## Understanding the travelling coffee-drinker

A specific theme in one of the Allegra sessions addressed the question of the consumer on the move. Every air or rail terminal now has a choice of hot-beverage services, and virtually every rail station, however small, seems to have an espresso kiosk. But what does the beverage industry know about these people? Surprisingly, several of the big players are using the same techniques to analyse commuter behaviour, including secret filming.

Ezio Balarini of Autogrill followed Kaspar Basse's line that surroundings and ambience are now more important than simply offering good coffee.

"Customers do not come just because you have a lot of products. Also, brand awareness does not by itself turn into sales. There is a paradox about brands in travel sites - the top brands are very important for developing business at travel sites, but this means all sites look the same, and the landlords don't like that."

He gave the example of London's Terminal 5, which has been described elsewhere as 'a shopping mall masquerading as an air terminal!' The old idea of a range of brands in a line is no longer tempting.

"So, we have to adapt and modify brands, to suit the type of person who now travels, and to suit how that person acts in a travel terminal."

General agreement came from Richard Barclay of the SSP group, the operator which took the Caffè Ritazza brand from zero to £100m in six years.

Local brand identity has become important, he observed.

"We can see that people like to arrive at a location and see 'something local'. So, at Malaga airport, we have Starbucks and Ritazza, but we also have Café & Thé, which is a local brand."

Another trend worth noticing, he said, is that business travellers are not so carefree with their spending as they used to be.

"In the last three years, over 60 per cent of travellers have said they are more aware of price than they were before - business travellers are now far more aware of what appears on their company credit card!"

Both SSP and BP's Wild Bean Cafe have taken to filming their sites to learn about customer behaviour. The importance of the petrol-station forecourt in the coffee market has risen sharply in recent years, and Mike Absalom of BP said that he has learned a lot about offering 'deals' to the road traveller.

A big lesson, he has discovered, is that the road traveller is amenable to the concept of meal-deals - but only if they are well-judged and well-displayed.

"What we do need is to use 'deal' offers to get them in and out of the cash area quickly, or we'll have frustrated drivers in queues at the pumps."

The big problem, said Absalom, is that although drivers are amenable to selling messages, they are not always mentally receptive.

"They are in a zombie state when they enter a forecourt - most of them can't even remember their own pump

"We had to make the way round our stores easier for the customers... we had been putting up too much point of sale material."

- Mike Absalom



number! So we have to approach them knowing that they're in that state.

"We did videos of our customers to see what they looked at, and what they touched. We realised from this that we had to make the way round our stores easier for the customers... we had actually been putting up too much point of sale material."

The secret of meal deals, he explained, is in not trying to make them

"Business travellers are now far more aware of what appears on their company credit card!"

- Richard Barclay



too clever. Unlike the example of Tim Wendelboe's specialist coffee bar, the key trick about the travelling public is that they know what they want - they want the most familiar fast-selling items. Put the familiar items into a deal, and drivers will buy.

"The key to meal deals is this - the customers know what they want, and they know what they will move on. So, don't use products which are not already best-sellers to prop up your deals, because it doesn't work.

"So now we do not complicate our offer - coffee is simply latte, cappuccino, espresso or Americano.

"Because we saw see that core products, joined together, drives take-up, we put these coffees into our meal deals and saw amazing uplifts. We then increased the price of the large coffee and muffin deal from £2.50 to £2.69... and sales went up!"

Simplicity and familiarity is more effective than attempting a high-quality offer, he warned.

"We did a really great artisan sandwich and drink in the Netherlands at £4.50, and it was very nice - but it just didn't work.

"We changed it for a simpler deal at two euros, for a drink and a familiar snack - sales went through the roof."

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Coffee house and tea-room operators are a rare breed, and each has its story – but few are as fascinating as the story of Babington's Tea Room, which is in one of the world's great locations... it's at the foot of the Spanish Steps in Rome. We popped in there recently to meet Rory Bruce, who told us the founder's story.

"In 1893 my great-grandmother, Isobel Cargill, and her best friend Anna-Marie Babington, came to Rome while doing the Grand Tour to console a broken heart - she had been left at the altar. In Rome, they found that there was nowhere to buy tea except at the pharmacy! So, being typically brave Victorian ladies, they decided to start a tea room.

"And the place today is very much as it was then."

The Spanish Steps are one of the world's great tourist landmarks - for reasons not entirely clear, it is as standard to come and sit on the steps as it is to throw a coin into the nearby Trevi fountain. The poet Keats died beside the steps.

It is said that the Steps have a place in the modern foodservice world – in 1986, the first McDonalds in Italy was opened nearby. The protests were so vehement that they led almost directly to the founding of the international Slow Food movement.

Eating fast food on the steps today is forbidden... not that anyone takes any notice.

But down by the foot of the Steps is a haven of genteel eating - Babington's. Rome's English tea-room has stayed open ever since the Victorian ladies created it, and been a chic meeting place even in the strangest circumstances.

"We stayed open through the war, even though the sign on the wall clearly said 'English tea-room,'" says Rory Bruce. "At one point the fascists were having political meetings in the front room, and the partisans were having tea in the back room!

"By the 1960s, it was the place to be seen, and we've had everyone here from film stars to the royal family. We make a point of doing nothing special for anyone famous, which is completely against the Italian mentality, but also means we get no paparazzi. We have an autograph album with messages in the 60s from stars like Tony Curtis, Anthony Quinn, Peter Sellers... I still go through it regularly, just looking at the names."

Although the clientele is largely Italian, the tea-room atmosphere remains firmly English... with a few concessions, although all the menu items are in English first and Italian second.

"The Italians generally like lemon in their tea, because they think it more refreshing than milk. We have suggested orange as an option, but now we automatically serve lemon, sugar and milk together to the table. Even though the Italians like our Special Blend, which is a good old English cuppa, they still prefer to drink it black with lemon.

"We do present afternoon tea, with English muffins, to my great-grandmother's original recipe, we have scones, and vintage Christmas plum puddings - we have a 1989 vintage plum pud which really is something else!

"We were the first to introduce 'brunch' to Italy, and also the first to introduce hamburgers, in the 1950s. We never got the credit for either of those, so I thought 'hell, let's show 'em high tea!' This is a halfway house between supper and lunch - hand-made shortbreads and cakes, imported maple syrup from Canada, honey from England, and cucumber and smoked salmon sandwiches.

"Our cream tea is with Scottish scones, and our own jams and marmalades - but not clotted cream, because we can't get it. We use whipped cream instead."

(It works well - when we were there, several chic Italian ladies were working on the question of

# An English tea-room, on the Spanish Steps...



## ... in Rome!

Coffee House discovers a remarkable outpost of English afternoon tea, on one of the most cosmopolitan tourist landmarks in the world

whether to put cream on first, or jam. From our base in Cornwall, *Coffee House* did try to broker a trade between Cornish clotted cream makers and the Italian cafe, but it foundered on problems of carriage!)

Babington's is, unashamedly, a classy tea-room.

"We are expensive," agrees Rory Bruce, "which is why our clientele is international. The English only come in when the pound is strong, because they don't like the idea of eight euros for a pot of tea!"

The cream tea for two is about 31 euros (about £26 at current rates). Teas alone go as high as 23 euros for a white silver needle, or 13 euros for a Pai Mu Tan white; the Royal blend is 10 euros (about £8), and this really has a British royal connection.

"We have 130 teas on the menu, twelve of which are our own blends, and one which was blended for

the Queen when she came here. It's Keemun from China with Darjeeling and a Formosa oolong.

"Our tea supplier has been Woodhams of London for as long as we remember - we even took them some water from Rome to them so they could get our Babington blend (Darjeeling and Ceylon) right. Canton of London have also done some teas for us, including a nice white tea with little rosebuds."

Training an Italian staff presented less cultural problems than might be expected.

"We have created a training manual for our staff, but we made a point of not making it too complicated. The real key is to make them enjoy what they're doing, and that's what makes them want to learn more, which makes everything easier... then they come out as enthusiasts."



Rory Bruce casts a quizzical eye over a fruit tea mix, and right, Babington's Monty Python-like modern packaging



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As many people have observed, the growth of quality tea rooms is almost as exciting as that of coffee-houses - the sector simply doesn't get the same attention.

A typical new arrival is Specialitea, in Exeter, which was created by Matthew Fletcher from the familiar situation of exasperation with the standard of tea available in the catering trade.

"My grandmother was brought up in Malaysia, and as a small boy I was surrounded by wonderfully ornate tea caddies and the smells of fine teas. So when the coffee chains came in, I wondered why anyone would pay their prices for a supermarket tea-bag in a cup! I went on Jane Pettigrew's tea course, and realised that we had to get people back to traditional tea drinking."

He does so by blatantly 're-directing' visitors to the subject of fine tea.

"Exeter is a fairly affluent city, with a great university, a great shopping area, and lots of visitors. Our part is close to the cathedral, and although the high-street shops are only about 50 yards away, our street is known for the traditional independent shops. We're forming a little committee to pool funds and promote the traders in this area as 'something different'."

As a tea-room, Specialitea looks more like a high-street coffee-house with its sofas, a kids' play area, and even free wi-fi.

"I've seen how most tea shops are laid out, and ours is certainly different. Parents adore the Little Leaves play area, and as nobody near here has anything like it, it makes for a longer dwell time."

There are several attention-getting aspects - the teapots particularly draw the eye. They're Canadian, and quite rare in featuring a snap-lock lid, with the action of the lid moving the brew basket for filling and for immersing in the water. Specialitea was lucky to get a hundred for retail and for tea-room use, and now has just enough left for its own use.

Water is from two Marco boilers for tea, one set at 90C-plus for blacks and infusions, and one at about 83-85C for greens and whites.

"Tea is all about the water, whereas you can be more rough-and-ready with coffee," remarks Matt. "The water in Exeter is good to start off with, but we do have a treatment system, and we recycle water as well - the old hot water from the boilers at the end of the day is used for washing the floor, and the first cold water drawn through at the beginning of the day goes to cleaning the toilets.

"We have big discussions about water, and it's important to work with it properly - we check the water quality throughout the day, and at the beginning of the day we brew a couple of pots of tea for ourselves first, just to make sure of the quality."

Coffee is secondary, but still treated seriously.

"We are a business, and we realise that we have a customer base of which many come through the door with 'coffee' in their head, and that half of many couples want tea and the other half want coffee... so we decided to do it properly, and we have a Rancilio espresso machine, from Roy Ireland.

"But we re-direct people back to tea. Even if they come in for a coffee, we offer them a free speciality tea, and it usually blows their coffee palate away. Then we point to our retail shelves!"

That tea is defiantly own-branded. Matt is exasperated by tea brand salesmen visiting, all looking for a 'stockist' - they don't understand, he says, that an independent trader puts a value on his own identity first and foremost. So he sources most of his tea from the Reginald Ames brokers in London, with direct buying from some estates in Darjeeling.

"We package by hand - bags, labels, tea, and volunteers in a line! The retail display in the shop is going to have to be enlarged, and although our online

# Redirecting customers to re-discover great tea



Matt Fletcher and one of those rare teapots - the tea fits into the holder and snaps down into the water.

business came before the bricks and mortar, it's growing because of the physical café.

"We took an off-the-shelf online shop system and customised it, then we did a Google pay-per-click campaign and search engine optimisation, which costs a fortune, backed up by physical fliers. Visitors to the city now visit the shop and come back to us online."

Notably, his teas perform differently through different sales routes. Online, the best performers are a second-flush Assam, and gunpowder green, which is popular enough to be bought in at five kilos at a time. In the shop, the best-selling retail packs are sencha and white silver needle... but in the cup, it is jasmine dragon pearl which is the star.

Does this mean that Specialitea customers are imaginative?

"No, they're confused, so we have to go through some questioning to find out what they'll like.

"You must never let staff ask 'what do you want?' because it just puts the customer on the back foot, but questions like 'do you like milk?' are always a good guide to start with, and from that you can work through to suggesting something you can be fairly sure they'll like.

"This is my favourite part of the job - helping a room full of people find their favourite teas is the best part of my day."

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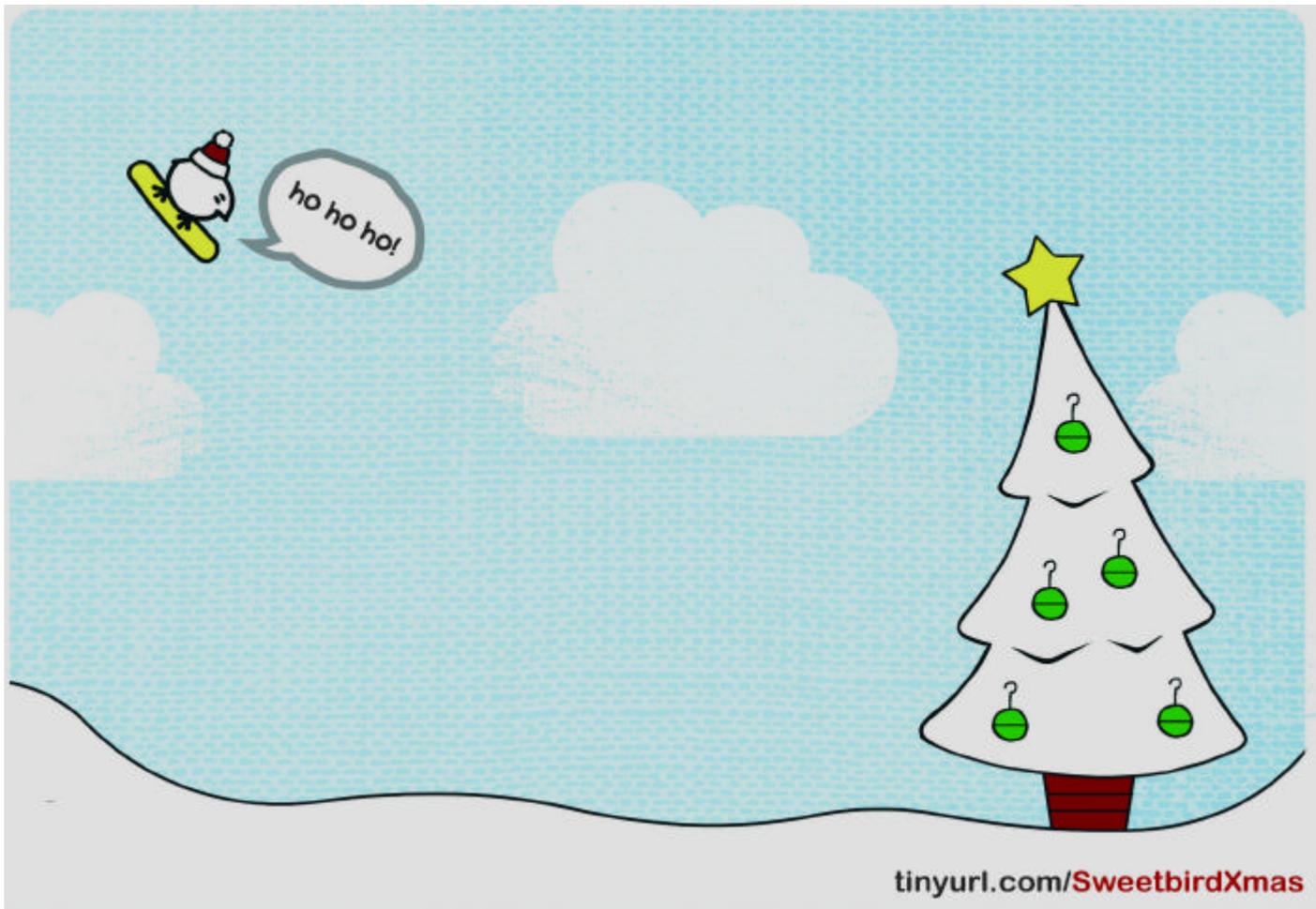
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