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COFFEE HOUSE



Scoop Malone, the top writer in the beverage trade press, here each month with all the news that counts!

February 2012

High streets must shrink or die, independent traders are told

There have been more gloomy predictions about the state of the national high street, the primary trading area for coffee houses and tea-rooms. Consumer spend is moving increasingly away from the high street, according to the latest work by the Local Data Company, whose latest Shop Vacancy report reviews the state of 700 town centres and says, generally, that while prime centre 'core' areas remain healthy, many secondary centres and shopping streets in outlying areas struggle as multiple retailers move out or fail.

The worst vacancy rates are in the Midlands and North – Stockport, Nottingham, Grimsby, Stockton, Wolverhampton, Blackburn, Walsall and Blackpool all have vacancy rates over 25 per cent. The researchers also say that one-fifth of UK shopping malls are now estimated to be in financial trouble, with around 20 'secondary shopping centres' already for sale.

In early February, the Local Data Company and British Property Federation held a Retail Summit on the vacancy problem. The summit heard that last year, 14.3 per cent of all shops stood empty – this is 48,000 units, and only 42 per cent of all spending is now done on the high street. It is further suggested that half of all retail leases will come due for renewal between now and 2015 and many, it is predicted, will simply not be renewed.

"The reality is that the odds are stacked against a positive take-up of shops," said director Matthew Hopkinson. "As such, the new reality of 48,000 empty shops is here to stay unless an alternative use or purpose can be found."

There is already the suggestion that the government might encourage retail properties to be converted for residential or educational use to overcome the perceived situation that towns with the highest vacant rates are becoming more vacant - "it's a contagious disease", said one speaker.

"We have a clash of two universes,"

it was said at the summit. "Landlords are still looking to maximise their income in a time of recession, and expecting rent quarterly for the full period of a lease, against operators dealing daily with declining revenues. Landlords have to wake up to the fact that a lot of high street retail space is now obsolete. We have to find a way to work together."

Meanwhile, a national newspaper has reported that the head of Sainsburys has echoed the idea of 'obsolete' retail areas in calling on the traditional high street to 'shrink or die',

as being 'a poor second to out of town shopping centres'. He did of course disclaim any responsibility for the state of the national high street.

However, in a small way, there has been an indication of a change of attitude. A BBC local station has reported the case of a landlord who bought ten empty shops in a badly-performing high street in Hampshire, one of which had been empty for 23 years. Within six months, he has seven let, and the others have leases agreed. He said he was happy to offer them at half the price that other landlords still expected.

This year's major drinks trend,, we are told, will be the tea cocktail – and pictured is a typical one created in a series of experiments between the Roy Ireland coffee business and Sebastian Hamilton-Mudge, a Cornish bar owner and a 'global ambassador' for Beefeater gin. They have been using the pyramid teabags from Drury. This is the Rob Toddy - 12-year-old malt, a lemon and ginger teabag, and some sweet Martini Rosso. The tea and whisky steep together for just thirty seconds, then you add the vermouth, and a twist of lemon. Selling price? As high as you like!

Pic: Jason Dreyer



Trade show creates its own 'commercial' barista contest

There has, as might be expected, been an interesting response to the launch of the Caffè Culture Barista Challenge as 'a new kind of barista contest'.

The event will be run at this year's trade show, and is designed to recognise 'the elements that go into making a successful coffee-based drink for real customers in real businesses'. Entrants will have to not just create a signature drink, but consider speed of service, marketability, and realistic costs, selling price and profit margin.

Participants, who must currently work in a coffee-house (or similar business) will have to prepare a short video about

their drink, which will be shown on the show's website before the event.

The winner will receive a trophy, a £1,000 cash prize, a range of equipment and products for the business in which they work, and promotion for the business through a PR campaign.

One former national champion barista told us: "it's about time some - one recognised the commercial aspects of these things, especially in these tough times."

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The founder of the Benugo's chain, Hugo Warner, will launch his new Market cafe concept in London in March. It is said that he has been inspired by the classic Italian 'formica cafes' of the 1950s which 'nourished a whole generation of writers, artists, musicians... and crime lords'!

The new Harland Café in John Street, Sheffield, is hosting a series of monthly Café Culture debates on politics, culture, philosophy, arts and science. The first one is hosted by a local MP, Paul Blomfield, on 'what makes a good society?' The café is also running events for both children and adults, with talks and craft and cooking sessions. The business has recently been taken over and re-named by husband-and-wife team Steve and Sara Bradley - it is their first experience of working together, and they say they nearly named the business The Mid-Life Crisis Café.

In Scarborough, the old St Nicholas Cliff lift may be turned into a café. The lift is a funicular railway, built in 1929 but closed in 2006 because the council could not afford repairs. The original idea was to sell it for redevelopment, but there were no bidders, and the council have now considered that the lifts themselves could be anchored at the top of the cliff and turned into a café.

The Brown Bag coffee shops, founded by Tony Edwards in 2003, is opening its fourth site in Woodley town centre. The cafes opened in Windsor, and have one high-street site and one health club site in Wokingham.

A rather imaginative promotion from Taylors of Harrogate has included one curious aspect. The new After Dark blend was promoted as an ideal Valentine's Night drink, and a suitable accompaniment to a box of chocolates. The brand has recommended serving it in a cafetiere, and given perfectly sensible brewing advice - before adding the suggestion of topping it with foamed milk and dusting with chocolate through a heart-shaped stencil. When we queried this, Taylors replied: "of course we know that adding cream or foamed milk to the top of a cup of filter coffee isn't something you would normally do - this was just meant to be a creative idea to add a little luxurious and romantic touch". One trade supplier said he recalled Starbucks once doing something similar with a drink that was half filter coffee, and half foamed milk, with some success.

The Lancashire Tea brand has helped out a Manchester college which was working on a fund-raising project to recreate a working 1930s tea room, with appropriately-dressed staff. Managing director Paul Needham contributed a factory visit and information about the history of tea in the north west.

A lot has been said about the single-serve coffee machine becoming

the biggest-selling piece of equipment in New York, which has inspired an interesting remark from the Sara Lee corporation, which worked with Philips in 2001 to introduce the Senseo pod machine. The Senseo is now seen as 'a very unsexy machine', a Sara Lee director told Reuters. "Today's youth don't want to be associated with Senseo. That will change." Sara Lee will discontinue Senseo in North America, except for sale through certain websites, where it will work to make the machine more appealing, especially for young people, to tap growth overseas. Sara Lee took full control of its Senseo by buying out Philips' interest, and hinted that it sees a future in single-serve machines that grind fresh beans.

Starbucks is among one of several businesses in Ealing to be prosecuted for not clearing up their rubbish. Some companies were caught on CCTV fly-tipping their rubbish, and Starbucks was fined for not ensuring that any waste not collected by its contractor by 10am was taken back to the premises, and for leaving sacks of rubbish on the footpath all day. The prosecution came after two previous penalty notices for the same offence, and this time Starbucks was fined a total of £1,381.03.

The South African rooibos tea industry is under threat from climate change, according to international reports. A farmer has said that rising temperatures make it more difficult for the plant to grow, and growers have had to change planting methods and even the growing season. It needs specific bacteria and fungi to be present in the soil and the pollination of certain bees and wasps, which are also under threat. "We have no choice but to listen to what the weather tells us," said a farmer. "If we don't our industry is doomed."

The New Harvest coffee shop has opened in Norwich, combining contemporary British and traditional Chinese styles. The three owners, Susan Lai, Grace Yan and Mandy Li, already have businesses in Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft.

The latest café breastfeeding problem comes from Mayfield in Kent, where a mother claims to have been despatched to the toilets to care for her child, despite having covered the baby with a shawl and none of the other customers objecting. The café owner has protested that she suggested a 'warm, comfortable area' outside the toilets. The National Childbirth Trust has reminded café operators of the Equality Act of 2010, and recommended that facilities and policies be clearly established and displayed.

Coffee #1 has applied to takeover the former Ballantyne's wine merchants store in Pontcanna, Cardiff - it is the first application by the chain's new owners, brewers SA Brain. Residents are said to be relieved that the incomer is not a supermarket.

One-cup cafe teamaker here soon

The one-cup tea brewer concept is in the prototype stage, with the intention of being launched to the beverage trade. It is the TeaTotal, from Cambridge Consultants, an Anglo-American design organisation which claims to be responsible for thirty recent 'new beverage dispense projects', and will make its first appearance at a design exhibition in California in mid-February.



The TeaTotal has hoppers mounted on the top, and a clear panel through which to see the brewing process, which involves 'swirling the leaves around as it steeps before pouring straight into a cup'. Rather curiously, the developers say that 'this highly visual process has been designed to bring a sense of luxury to an everyday item' - it might be thought that this is the attitude which classy cafes and tea-rooms have been adopting for years!

Perhaps reasonably, the principal engineer of Cambridge Consultants' Consumer Team has observed that: "tea drinkers stand in line in a retail outlet and watch as their coffee-drinking fellow customers are treated to a personal 'barista experience'... then they are presented with a mug of hot water and a soggy bag on a string. Tea drinkers deserve more."

However, the makers say that the machine brews the tea in just two minutes, or half the time of traditional methods. Temperature and water volume are programmable, but we can find no further details. When Coffee House put it to the manufacturer that good teas take between three to five minutes to brew, because that is what is correct in terms of physics, Cambridge Consultants replied:

"We ran a number of tests with our parameters set at different values and had a group of consumers taste tea brewed in TeaTotal, versus the same tea brewed in a regular tea pot. We quickly learned the best settings for different teas, and the blind tastings showed our two-minute tea to come out as good or better than a four-minute regular pot. As well as making good tea in half the time, having control over the different parameters allows us to customise the taste of the tea, which is much harder to do in a regular pot."

Every British tea supplier we spoke to about the machine disagreed... radically!

Bespoke coffee in flatpacks

It is the interesting packaging which we have found the intriguing aspect of the relatively new service by Eightpointnine, the company which has aroused a lot of interest by offering consumers an online design-your-own-blend service. One of the interesting aspects of the service is posting the coffee in flat card boxes to avoid any delivery problems if the customer is out. "Our box isn't 'guaranteed' as such to fit through any letter box, but we have only had one case out of hundreds where it didn't fit, and that was a very old cottage," the company tells us. The concept of 'bespoke' blends in small quantities has (as might be expected) aroused radically different opinions from the rest of the trade. The process is by a kind of online meter, in which the consumer selects from descriptions such as 'fresh, sweet, spicy, light, mellow, rich', and an onscreen meter shows them the suggested blend to fit - typically, 'sweet and mellow' offers Costa Rican, Guatemalan and Brazilian in more or less equal portions. One trade supplier suggested that 'bespoke blends may be the way ahead', while another was extremely critical and said that the business model was 'marketing over substance'. (You can experiment at www.eightpointnine.com). The product illustrated is the pleasingly-named Indonesian house blend 'Frank Sumatra'.



An American inventor has created a lid which allows consumers to convert a standard domestic preserves or pickling jar into a travel mug. The standard pickling jar, they say, already has the attributes of being easy to clean, cheap, durable, and made of heat-resistant glass, with a leak-free seal. The new idea is of the Cuppow, a sip-through lid which replaces the standard screw-on metal lid. The method can be seen at www.cuppow.com

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Espressamente, the Illy cafe chain, has opened its first American site in San Francisco, in a building which used to be a Starbucks. The Italian business is notable in its use of digital menu boards, which you can see either side of the back bar (just under the famous Illy chandelier of espresso cups!) for an easy-to-update system. Gregg Zinn, the boss of SmarterSign in New York, told *Coffee House*: "the system was designed for ease of use, with the typical learning curve being less than ten minutes – the system requires no technical or design expertise and changes such as prices can be done in seconds." He offers interested operators a demonstration using the 'webinar' format.

Leckenby's begins to franchise

Leckenby's Tea Rooms, the north-western business, has opened what is intended to be the first of a chain of franchised branches. The new site is next door to the Kendal Milne department store in King Street West, off Deansgate, in Manchester city centre.

The theory, according to Jean Leckenby, is to cater for the customer 'who appreciates being waited on in attractive and spotlessly-clean surroundings, whether they want just a coffee, a tea, or a three-course meal'. Leckenby's began life as a specialist chocolate shop in 1997, added a tea room the next year, and tea is now the major concentration of the business.

The brand's franchise manager Tony Cunningham says that he will welcome applicants who understand what franchising is all about, a point made recently by many similar companies.

"Too many people think that once they are up and running they can do what they want... so why do they buy into a franchise? We are looking for hard-working people who wish to replicate exactly what we have done in developing an award-winning concept. A certain business know-how would be a bonus, but people who are confident and yet willing to listen to advice and able to follow the operations manual will help us all develop.

"Being based in Bury, with our own local tea room as the example, it will be easier to set up early franchises in an area within an hour of the town. But we have received enquiries from every part of the UK, and we do not close our options."



This is the world's tiniest moka pot – one inch tall, brewing a tiny amount of coffee in 25 seconds. It was made in sterling silver by Italian goldsmith Pietro Marmo and features a working filter and gasket. The brew recipe is 'ten drops of water and a pinch of coffee'.



International Paper invited design students from the Mid Cheshire College to submit designs for a paper cup. The winner was Jessica Lawrence, with a mixed-typography design in what is a contemporary style. It will probably be put into production this year.

Starbucks is to open its first franchised stores in the UK later this year, and will spend £8million in refurbishing 70 London stores before the Olympic Games, with major renovations in the West End and City. The chain has described the franchise move as 'significant', in that the brand expects to open up in small towns under local management.

In the north, protesters have claimed that a proposed Starbucks drive-through at St Helens will be sited at what is a notorious accident blackspot, and will make traffic conditions more difficult. Starbucks has offered to pay for a pedestrian crossing, but the campaigners, who have already prevented a McDonalds being built at the same place, say that the junction is simply too dangerous a place for such a business.

A giant mosaic made from 55,000 coffee beans has been created as a temporary sign for the Crumblin' Cookie café-bar in Leicester, promoting a forthcoming comedy festival. The interesting aspect of the work was the three-colour finish, achieved by using green, medium-roast and dark-roasted beans.

The bubble tea concept, which was the theme of a new café in London last year, has now developed from the town of Soham. The Bubble Tea House company, which imports bubble tea ingredients from Taiwan and distributes them to cafes throughout the UK, has outgrown its first small warehouse and has taken on additional storage and fulfilment facilities.

Bubble tea is a drink which features tapioca 'pearls', sucked up through a straw. It became a major trend in Taiwan some years ago, but also suffered a major crash when the fashion ebbed.

A Californian sports clothing company is selling thermal inner clothing made from coffee grounds. The Virus StayWarm range uses 'coffee charcoal', which is grounds that are recycled and processed into a fibre that can be worked into a base layer fabric that traps heat close to the skin. Tests have shown that the garments increase surface temperature by 10F. However, it also counters perspiration.

The No2 Pound Street coffee shop in Aylesbury has been running 'charity Mondays', in which customers are given free tea or coffee in return for a donation to whatever charity the shop is currently supporting. Recent causes have included the local MS centre and a hospital transport service for acutely-ill children. The ideal donation is reckoned to be the cost of the drink the customer had ordered.

Following the launch of Peter Andre's coffee shop, the latest move by a television personality to open a coffee house comes from Mick Norcross, who has been in *The Only Way Is Essex* and *Big Brother*. He proposes to open coffee shops in Brentwood to help promote his existing Sugar Hut nightclub business. Two other cast members have already opened salons and boutiques in Brentwood.

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A Bristol branch of the Soho Coffee Co has raised more than £1,300 for the Cots for Tots appeal, which aims to develop the neo-natal intensive care unit at a local hospital. One of its activities, which we can't quite visualise, was a Where's Wally weekend.

It is now possible to sky-dive in aid of Shelter from the Storm, the London homeless centre supported by many in the coffee trade. There are 40 places available for a group dive that is tentatively planned for the second weekend in July. The request is that participants raise £400 for Shelter from the Storm. For more details, please e-mail comms@sfts.org.uk. Parachutes are optional.

The bakery chain Greggs has said that it proposes to move further towards the coffee-house business after its first Greggs Moment coffee shop in Newcastle did well during the festive season. There will be two or three more test outlets before plans for a national chain are decided. The chief executive has pointed out that although Greggs is already a chain of over 700 sites, less than a tenth of them have any seating, which makes the new concept a considerable change in tactics.

Entries are still being invited for the coffee section of the Young British Foodies awards. The organisers have told us that with the awards only six weeks away, they will welcome late entries. The awards seek to 'embrace the new culinary personalities breaking boundaries in the food and drink world'. There are sections for chefs, mixologists and the like, but there is also the curiously-titled Coffee King or Queen section, which will be judged by Gwylm Davies, Tim Styles and Marco Arrigo. There is no entry fee - the entrant simply needs to write a 150-word summary of their skill, their product or their business idea. Further details: www.the-ybfs.com

There has been a rather unusual compliment for the Urban Coffee business in Birmingham, which has received an approving review in, of all

places, the New York Times - which called the bar 'eclectically stylish, with spacious rooms, clean-lined décor and beanbags'.

Teknomat has opened 'Room 71', its new training and presentation facility at its head offices in Buckinghamshire.

The Paper Cup Company has moved to a larger site in Clitheroe, opened by the mayor. Seven years after opening in Mark Woodward's front room, the company now distributes to many other countries, has taken on four more staff in the last month or two, and expects to take on eight more this year.

The new TeaJay range of ten tea blends has been launched by Selen Mostyn of Goole. She has launched a range of black, green, herbal and fruit tea blends. There are some unusual blends - a melon oolong, and a herbal blend of mango cubes, lemongrass, and dried leaves of Sideritis, a Greek mountain plant. The founder ran tea rooms and tea stores in Germany for several years, and in the UK she could not find the teas she liked, so imported her own for blending to her liking.

Another new tea company to crop up is Eteaket, run by Erika Moore in Edinburgh. She runs both a tea-room and a wholesaling operation, and has won a contest in the local evening paper, which involved pitching a business idea to a panel of 'experts'. She won free advertising in the paper and specialist mentoring.

Yet another innovative cafe competition has cropped up - Britain's Best Builder's Breakfast. It's run by Magnet, the building trade suppliers. Decision is by public vote.

There is now a specialist service for the supply of first-aid equipment to the cafe and catering trades - it is a specialised website which says it will help businesses get what they need 'without having to trawl through a maze of product lines'. It's at www.cateringfirstaid.co.uk.

Another pubco takes coffee seriously

There is yet another move by a pub company towards the coffee business - the Spirit Pub Company, which has about 800 managed pubs and around 500 leased sites, has decided to promote Costa branded coffee across its Chef & Brewer, Fayre & Square and Flaming Grill brands. Costa itself, it is said, is now looking at more avenues for brand diversity, including further openings at universities after what is reportedly a successful trial.

The Spirit group has now put Costa coffee into 300 of its sites, is working with United Coffee to bring in new Black and White automatic machines, and has created a coffee training scheme for hundreds of staff.

According to Kevin Harper, the pubco's food and supply-chain director, the move towards coffee was a serious strategic plan which took a year in the preparation. "In the pub business, you look at 'reasons for visiting'. We already have compelling reasons in beer, food, and for families with kids, because we have the biggest indoor play areas in the business.

"So far, pubs have been mediocre as for as coffee service goes - a tin, a kettle, something warm and brown. So we looked at making this another 'reason to visit', and we realised that coffee houses have become intrinsically linked with wi-fi - that's why you see so many suits in McDonalds. And if they can do it, we can do it better, in a nicer warm environment.

"Then we brought in our own outside auditors, as well as the Costa ones. Our mystery shoppers will now always order a coffee, which was never before a subject on our audits."

The trainer is Murray Leslie, who was at one time managing director at Gala Coffee when it was acquired by the company which was to become

United Coffee, and who was also once a director at Whitbread, the parent of Costa.

Spirit does not intend to follow other pub chains in discounting coffee, says Kevin Harper.

"Wetherspoon wanted to make a statement when they priced coffee at 49p. They got great volume - we are pricing in line with Costa's prices, but also in line with our own concept. So we will not always be selling at the same price - we'll align it to what a local market will take."

Big US market success is eco-unfriendly

Although the American coffee industry has seen the rise of the single-cup coffee maker as one of its biggest success stories, there are now queries over the environmental impact of the process.

In America, 46 percent of the money spent in December on coffee or espresso makers went to single-serve machines, and one major brand claims that 13 percent of all U.S. offices have one of its brewers.

However, the industry says that single-cup is 'one of our most significant environmental challenges.' All the various capsules and cartridges are non-biodegradable, difficult to recycle - and nine billion of them have been sold in the US alone, says one report.

In spite of this, the manufacturers have been non-committal about the increasing trend for domestic users to want refillable compatible capsules - one company in America has invented a re-usable plastic lid for the country's most popular capsule, and a YouTube video shows one user explaining how a capsule can be re-used ten times.



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Costa begins to 'grade' its food choice

Costa have confirmed to us that they are now stocking their sites according to a grading system – not all cafes now carry the same food.

Following an enquiry as to why customers could no longer buy certain items they liked, Costa told us: "We have introduced a banding system. This system splits stores into three different bands, bronze, silver and gold, according to each store's average weekly food sales. The band the store falls into will determine which products are stocked. This system has been put in place to make sure we have the right products in the right stores and help to prevent food wastage."

Meanwhile, there has been a bizarre turn in one of the longest-running battles between Costa and a local council – Bristol City Council has issued enforcement notices for two franchised

Costa premises in the city, and is investigating complaints about a third in nearby Westbury-on-Trym. The authority refused permission for one branch in September, but a planning committee meeting has now been told that the site cannot be ordered to stop trading, despite having been found to be against local planning regulations, because it is 'not doing enough harm'.

Another hearing will be held, but councillors have heard that until then, the council can do nothing, because serving notice to stop trading would leave the council open to a claim for compensation. One councillor said: 'the public will simply think we have no teeth'.

Roaster opens up his coffee prices

A useful insight into current coffee prices has been given by Tim Wendelboe of Norway – he is one of the most respected baristas in the world, who now runs his own micro-roastery, and has given an interesting snapshot into his costs. Although the current commodity price is around \$2.20 per pound, Wendelboe made a decision to only buy directly from farmers. As a result, his average price paid in 2011 went up to \$5.45. It is extremely unusual for a roaster to reveal the prices he pays for his green coffee, and so Tim Wendelboe's list might show café owners what a roaster invests before he even gets down to the business and cost of roasting the beans. His top three coffees each cost \$7.55 per pound – that is, around eleven pounds sterling a kilo before roasting. His 'cheapest' coffees were all four dollars a pound, or just over £6 a kilo, before roasting. It will be interesting to see whether coffee suppliers will use these now-published figures to show the general catering and hotel trades why they simply cannot get high-quality roasted beans for under a fiver a kilo!



Another combination of bike-shop and coffee house has cropped up, and the new one has won a 'business ideas' competition run by the University of the Highlands and Islands. Penny Phillips and Laura Nicolson intend to open Velocity in Inverness as a cafe with a workshop where cyclists can fix their bikes themselves, with access to tools, or with help from a mechanic.

The Water4Ethiopia bottled water product, reported in these pages a few months back, reports that it has almost finished three more 'capped spring' water projects, which are expected to help some Ethiopian communities to rely on clean water for the next 20 years.

Sharon and Tony McMurray of Towcester Tea Rooms have organised a triple fund-raising challenge based on the Olympics, but for local charities. The fundraiser will include two marathons, a bike ride and a kayak race, and Sharon McMurray will complete the first leg when she runs the Silverstone half marathon in March. Her husband will cycle from Towcester to London, and kayak along the Thames before taking part in the London 2012 marathon in April.

The Little Coffee Van, a mobile business in Darlington run by Gill and Mike Cartwright, has achieved some useful publicity through being highlighted by one of the characters from the BBC series *Dragons' Den*. In a weekly contest, businessman Theo

Paphitis invites small businesses to Tweet him, and he 're-tweets' his favourite six. The coffee business reported an exceptionally busy week to follow, with 200 extra online followers, increased online coffee orders and some potential new business contacts. (The Piaggio van they use used to be operated by Annabel Townsend, the 'Doctor Coffee' lady who created a North East Coffee Festival last year, and who did her university thesis on coffee, which is expected to be published in April).

The Paper Cup Company of Clitheroe has won a place in the shortlist of the Environmental Impact section of the Lancashire Business View awards.

Some startling reports from Kenya suggest that farmers are now installing CCTV and hiring armed guards to protect coffee stocks from criminals. Organised crime cartels, with alleged links to reputable exporters, are reported to be hiring gangs to raid farms and factories. There have been many deaths, and even the allegation that police are involved in the robberies.

There's a terrific new coffee-related song based on Bar Italia of Soho – you can see it and hear it on YouTube. It's performed by the wonderfully-named Ray Gelato (Italian for 'ice-cream!') and the video really does show off the variety of the colourful 'Soho character' clientele of that famous coffee house.

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What is the true state of the world's coffee-growing communities? How poor are they, how 'backward' are they, or how professional and 21st-century are they?

For all the vast number of people who work with coffee, only a very tiny percentage get the privilege of ever travelling 'to origin', to see a working coffee farm. Rather disturbingly, a large number of coffee salespeople certainly never have, which may account for the way the product is sold to the trade.

By contrast, there are those who have to do so very regularly, for their business - many of our craft roasters are at origin frequently, but even more so are the green-bean traders who supply our trade's roasters. It has become a practice for those traders to write reports on their trips to origin, and those reports can provide a useful snapshot of life on the farm.

A typical one is Simon Wakefield, of DR Wakefield - he has been travelling the world's coffee farms since he was a teenager, and his business today is with the trade's roasters, but the reports of what he finds at origin are equally fascinating to the average barista.

And, he is interested to see, more of the average high street café operators are showing an appreciation of what goes on at origin, and the situation of farmers. Is it healthy for the frontline trade to take an interest in the very opposite end of the business?

"Absolutely!" he told us. "If you are

Down on the farm...

What really is happening at origin, and what is the farmers' standard of living and working conditions? Some answers can be found in traders' diaries.



Simon Wakefield with a symbol of the basis of our entire industry - the golden bean

fortunate enough to have an interest in what makes you your living, you'll have more fun doing it, and make more money. If you understand the people in coffee, you'll do better business.

"Taking an interest is always good for business. On a trip to Indonesia, I saw a sack full of something that looked like hazelnuts, brown and shiny. I asked what they were, and they turned out to be from a naturally-processed coffee. Because we were curious and asked, we found something we could sell."

It is generally assumed that coffee farmers work in poor conditions, and for a long time, the trade has persisted with the image of Juan Valdez and his

donkey. To what degree does the image of the 'simple peasant' in a remote and unforgiving countryside remain true? Must we still respect the fact that the product we deal with, and which comes to us conveniently in sealed kilo bags, depends on people working in very difficult circumstances?

The donkey is still an essential part of this trade - Simon Wakefield tells of farms in the Dominican Republic where only donkeys and horses can get through to carry all the cherries to the wet mill. (By contrast, in some Peruvian farms, the only practical way to carry the crop is in wheelbarrows!)

"The last thing you want to come back as is a donkey!" laughs Simon Wakefield. "They have bloody hard lives in these countries. We do now see more motorbikes, which can be the next best thing to get around in some places. Four-wheel drives are certainly not found across the board, although when you do see them, you see them used for what they were made for, which is not driving around Chelsea.

"Yes, we are certainly talking of places with dry latrines, no power cables, and towns which may have only one place with water and a generator... and one of those I stayed in doubled as a brothel!"

"Yes, it is a simple life. But does that make it a worse life? No, I don't think so, because these people are happy."

It has long been said that many coffee farmers have no concept at all of what happens to their product on the other side of the world; however, in Hawaii Simon wrote that 'many Hawaiian farms have a domestic roasting business as well as a café, which not only brings in local dollars but helps them better understand the consumer requirements'. So, what is the farmers' knowledge of us, both of our trade and our consumer audience, of what we do with their product, and what we need from it?

"Many farmers don't taste it, or even understand what 'a cup of coffee' is all about - to them, it's just a survival cash crop. If they do drink it, it may be just

the export rejects.

"But those who say this is always the case are out of touch. The swing is certainly to tasting and cupping - the managers of co-ops now travel, and they take the coffee mentality of other countries back to their people. We now see them understanding what our idea of 'quality' is all about."

There is a practical aspect to this.

"We sponsored a contest for a co-operative in Peru, and agreed to buy the top ten winning lots at a high price, so there was an incentive for the farmers. They even understood the SCAA scoring marks, the criteria for speciality coffee.

"But they also understood the importance of the opposite - they understand perfectly well that they certainly don't want the problem of being told their coffee isn't good enough, and having to find somewhere to offload it."

It has also been said for a long time that farmers have been dependant on the man at the farm gate... essentially, that the farmer is a humble, put-upon, peasant. To what degree must we respect the idea that managers of co-operatives are now perfectly good, well-educated businessmen?

"There's still poverty out there. But yes, they do know what they're about. Just because they don't have GCSEs, they're not stupid. Take a 'humble farmer' who's got some coffee, a cow, some chickens, and a hand-pulper, and you'll find he's going to work out how to put them together for cheap fertiliser!"

That, adds Simon Wakefield, explains why so much coffee complies with organic and Rainforest certification so easily - "we have met farmers who believed in these principles before the Western World certifiers could even spell the words".

Although he sees facilities improving at more and more farms, with clean drying patios, and more proper offices and cupping rooms, this progress does not always come as easily as the usual pictures of smiling grateful farmers might suggest.

Many customers and the 'certifying authorities' are putting a lot back into the farms in the way of 'technology', but the way of doing so often causes a certain friction between the 'educated' customer nations and the 'humble' farming regions over acceptable ways of farming. Many of those farmers know perfectly well what they are doing - and yet, bizarrely, someone has to pay so that the western world can see 'certified proof' that long-established and completely natural practices are acceptable to our notions of good practice.




Specialist Green Coffee Merchants
Sourcing directly from the farmers

DR WAKEFIELD & Company Limited
trade@drwakefield.com www.drwakefield.com



"We had a co-op in Peru which was certified Fairtrade and organic, and we asked about getting Rainforest Alliance certification as well, because it would allow them access to a wider market," recalls Simon Wakefield. "They were one of the first to get 100 per cent on their first certification.

"Why? Because they're so remote.

"They've never been able to lug chemical fertilisers to the farm, so of course they're organic... but the market has to have its paperwork, so they had to be 'certified'!"

This bureaucracy does not always go down well at origin, particularly when certifying authorities start pulling rank. Farmers at a co-operative were quite insulted when European buyers said they had to put in new toilets and even, bizarrely, a door marked 'exit'. The farmers knew perfectly well where the door went, but the certifying authority demanded it!

This can appear patronising, acknowledges Simon Wakefield.

"In some cases, certification can be a good thing, and it has resulted in many farmers using far less chemicals. But we do see cases of inspectors coming in who speak the wrong language, and can't communicate with the farmers. That really is insulting, and you do wonder how much we dictate to them without a real understanding of how things on their farms really work."

There are other considerations which really do not bear any resemblance to our western pontifications about the way the world is going.

The Wakefield company noted in one recent origin report that: 'climate

change's biggest fan is the Sumatran coffee farmer who every other month is pulling off a cash crop from his bountiful trees'. That surprised those who read it, but there is an explanation.

"Here, we may laugh about our early-flowering plants, but then we don't have to make money from them," he observes. "The farmer does, and if his cherries are ripening at different rates, his traditional coffee season becomes elongated. The farmer is now constantly going back and back to find the ripe ones, and make sure no over-ripe cherries stay on the plant to be wasted.

"This in turn means that his income becomes a drip-feed, which can be a good thing because in the past, farmers in some places have had a wonderful time for the short period in which they pick the cherries and get paid. They live like kings for a while, and then go without for the rest of the year.

"So in a way, climate change has forced some of these people into a better budget - they're getting their money coming in at a different rate."

The problem of money has been the big one in recent months, with coffee prices becoming completely unpredictable. At the same time, many roasters have blamed farmers for defaulting on pre-agreed contracts, when the world price has suddenly soared and the man at the farm gate offers them a better price than the one they signed up for.

It is all very well to complain about contracts, says Wakefield, but business at origin works a different way. Certain co-operatives may well be Fairtrade-certified, but they still give their individual members the option of selling to the open market if it is more beneficial.

"This is a big problem. Different co-ops have different rules - some say 'if you want to be a member, you deliver us all your coffee'. Some say 'deliver what you want, when you want', and this attitude falls down when the co-op finds it cannot honour its contracts.

"With the Fairtrade social premium of twenty cents a pound, which is supposed to go into community benefits, the ideal attitude should be 'if you want all the benefits, deliver all your coffee'. But we are dealing with so many cultures that Fairtrade's rules can't suit all, and of course you have a problem with people. Even if Jose wants to do something, Pablo may not. Certainly, running a co-op is difficult - it can work very well at village level, but when you have a thousand members, it can get blooming difficult."

Farmers are very aware of the uncertainties over price, even if neither manual labourer nor suited western trader really know what will happen next. Simon Wakefield is

as exasperated as every other coffee trader, but sympathetic.

"The co-ops now have a pretty good understanding that it is an incredibly volatile market and that nobody can tell them what will happen next.

"There certainly have been defaults on contracts, but it's very easy for me to complain about that from my nice warm office. For a trader, there are many chances to buy and sell, numerous times.

"But a farmer has only one chance to sell - well, he may hang back a bit, hoping prices will go up, but he certainly can't play around with the market like traders can."

And he can be forgiven for occasionally doubting what his big-city customers tell him.

"Here, we have enough trouble experiencing problems like the Euro, one of which recently caused the price of coffee to drop twenty cents in a day..."

"Well, how on earth do you explain that to a farmer in Honduras?"

"You do wonder how much we dictate to farmers without a real understanding of how their farms work."

- Simon Wakefield

Fairtrade Fortnight this year is
Feb 27-March 11



The big current project for Equal Exchange is 'making the invisible visible', which refers to the fact that over half of its coffee products are now entirely sourced from women farmers, with more to come.

Women, the brand points out, make up the majority of the world's farmers and produce perhaps eighty per cent of the world's food. These coffees are, the brand says, not just evidence of the expertise of the women farmers, but a reminder of the need for Fairtrade to meet the UN Millennium development goals on the matter.

"Consumers see mostly generic and undifferentiated Fairtrade offers which tell little of the story - we are committed to doing so."

The situation of women farmers, according to the remarks of one such



lady, gives food for thought: "In meetings, you will now see women present and we have the right to participate in decision-making processes - this may seem very obvious or simple to you, but before, this would never happen. We now participate because of all of our hard work... we may not have an education but we have land, and hands to work with.

"Machismo is very big in the rural areas where we live. The men don't want to educate their daughters - my husband didn't see the point of sending our girls to school, because they are women. Because of my insistence, three of my children study (the other two are too young).

"I didn't have the chance to study, but I sell my coffee at a good price, and I now have a right to an opinion in my house."

Wicked Coffee, which will have special Fairtrade offers, has also adopted the Coffee Kids cause, and has

made its first donation of £600. As well as winning the Roadchef motorway services station contract, Wicked has also won a defence sector contract and supplies around 35,000 forces personnel. The company's sales have gone up 45 per cent in twelve months.



Cafeology has created a sister project, Teaology, working with Chinga Tea Factory of Kenya and the country's Tea Development Agency. It will support various Fairtrade projects, schools and building of new roads. The brand's Andy McClatchey says it has been 'quite a task' to launch in time for Fairtrade Fortnight. Teaology is available in one cup, tagged and tagged enveloped bags, loose leaf and speciality teas. Cafeology will host a Fairtrade coffee tasting event at the Crucible theatre, Sheffield, to showcase different coffees and Fairtrade Coffee Cocktails.

Essential Trading has created a range of five biodynamic, fairtrade, organic herbal teas, grown in Egypt on reclaimed desert land. Marketing manager Eli Sarre says that while organic teas are commonplace, Fairtrade and biodynamic teas are very tricky to source. "To have a whole range sourced from one purpose-built ecosystem on reclaimed land is really something special."

Elsewhere in ethical dealing, the Rainforest Alliance has its 25th anniversary this year. Its aims are to ensure that more than 177 million acres of forestland are managed sustainably, protect more than 10,000 miles of freshwater streams, implement water conservation practices, and train a thousand farmers to implement climate-friendly agricultural practices. We have pointed out, and they have acknowledged, that another good resolution would be to actually make the British coffee trade aware of their Awareness Week, which they forgot to do last year.

There is a new light-roast version of the Café Cuidado espresso coffee, a Rainforest-certified one from Drury - while the blend has not been changed, the lighter roast is said to bring a milder, fruitier flavour, yet still forceful enough to come through in a cappuccino or latté.

Is there still business growth in fair-trade? Opinion in the coffee-house trade is clearly divided as to whether the movement has had its day, or whether it is still a rising market.

There is one extremely large example of how a coffee company can rise on the tide of ethically-sourced goods - Peros, where directors James Roberts and Peter Goodey really were in at the birth of what might be called the ethical-trading 'boom'.

Peros is now by far the biggest food-service distributor of Cafedirect coffee to the trade, and has also created probably the biggest wholesale collection of ethically-sourced café-relevant goods. But they started in the sector by accident - the partners were contract caterers working on government business, when it was announced that the public departments they supplied would all change to Fairtrade coffee.

"We were in the right place at the right time, but we couldn't source Fairtrade coffee in bulk," recalls James Roberts. "Cafedirect was only retail at that time, so we had to go to the local supermarket and clear their shelves of it! We realised that there was nobody to meet the demand for Fairtrade coffee in contract catering and foodservice, so we started Peros to distribute Cafedirect coffee in bulk."

Did they push the market, or ride it?

"We feel our products have helped grow the demand, to the extent that Fairtrade in foodservice is now mainstream, and trade customers are now not just offering 'a Fairtrade alternative' - they may now offer a second Fairtrade product as an alternative to the first!

"The consumer expectation of Fairtrade is greater than ever, so operators need to meet this expectation."

Who is driving it now? At an ethics conference in January, a speaker said: 'relying on the customer to drive it is flawed... this must be driven by the



COFFEE KIDS

Coffee Kids appreciates the continuing support of its friends in the British coffee trade through our recent administrative changes. May we advise that our British contact is now Elisa Kelly, tel: 07581713457 or elisa@coffeekids.org. The board of Coffee Kids hopes to be back in the UK very soon, and will be extremely pleased to meet again with our supporters to tell you of our most recent projects.

Fairtrade - growth is still there



Thumbs up for James Roberts and One Water on a visit to a community in Africa which has been helped by Playpumps

Promotion of this year's Fairtrade Fortnight has been under-stated, and some operators have expressed doubts - but the trade's biggest Fairtrade wholesaler says business is rising

retailers and supply chain'. Essentially, it was argued that ethical products must be 'sold' for the customer to want them... if the café trade wants to make money from Fairtrade products, it has to push them.

"There is no black-and-white answer to this - the truth is, the market is part demand-led and part supply-led," says James Roberts. "There is still growing consumer demand for ethically-traded coffee, but of course that demand needs to be met by the supply chain, which has to adjust itself accordingly. Once the supply chain starts to supply Fairtrade goods, it will obviously want to promote them, so you get a supply-led situation."

What has unsettled some frontline operators is the identity of those doing the biggest pushing. Those who wish to meet the interests of their ethically-conscious customers are not always hard-sell traders, and some of them have said that while they believe in grassroots fair-trade, they have trouble with the recent use of the Mark by giant brands, alleging that those brands just use a small amount of Fairtrade goods to allow them to use the Mark as 'a marketing trick'. How many cafe operators are, to quote one of them, now 'struggling with their Fairtrade feelings'?

"I suppose in some ways Fairtrade is a victim of its own success," offers Roberts. "It has progressed from a minority, activist group to a worldwide brand. That transition has meant that global brands such as Nestle and Mars now want to be associated with it. It's natural that grassroots enthusiasts have some difficulty coming to terms with this."

"But the Fairtrade Foundation recently announced that Mars's commitment will help to provide more than a million dollars annually in Fairtrade premiums to farmers' co-operatives in West Africa. The more products carrying the

Fairtrade Mark means the more money there is to help the producers - that's got to be a good thing."

It also brings the situation that everyone else has to promote better to avoid letting all the Fairtrade business go to the giants.

And yet everybody says that there should be a lot more support for the frontline trade from suppliers. The support marketing of Fairtrade goods is, it is generally accepted, not always that hot. Should suppliers and the ethical organisations be getting down to some more basic grass-roots talking with the trade?

"We're talking to the trade all the time!" protests James Roberts. "Perhaps our biggest challenge is to ensure that consumers understand how much their choice really can have a positive impact on lives in underdeveloped regions. We generate a great deal of information about this - our branding and point-of-sale material tells the story of the growers and how Fairtrade benefits them - that's all readily available to the trade and it talks directly to the consumers. Our product guide is not just product listings but in-depth articles about some of the background issues behind ethical trading, corporate social responsibility, sustainability and climate change."

"We've also been busy developing our own ranges of Fairtrade products, Eros coffee and One World bakery products, to help bring a greater choice of products to market."

"We have been trying to communicate the nitty-gritty of ethical trading with the trade, and the awareness figures for Fairtrade would suggest that we as an industry have done a very good job in getting that message across."

Possibly the most effective product in recently communicating ethical trading has been water. The Peros item is One

Water, a water which is sourced in this part of the world and raises money to give water to those in poorer countries.

One Water provides money for the Playpump, a kind of roundabout which draws water from wells in Africa - a Playpump can conceivably draw 1,400 litres an hour if rotated at 16 rpm.

Peros has often referred to the simplicity of the concept of water-for-water, and maintains that the relatively simple product branding demonstrates that the revenue really is going where it is needed, not being spent on the packaging. And yet, recently, a rival ethical water company made a point of saying that it gave far more of its own product price to the cause than any other such water.

Is bottled water making a big contribution?

"Since 2006, we have helped provide for a hundred Playpumps that supply clean water to nearly 200,000 people in sub-Saharan Africa, and £78,000 to the One Foundation's East Africa Emergency Appeal fund, providing water to 250,000 people in Kenya."

"Many of our trade customers have got behind this sufficiently to sell enough bottles to buy 'their own' Playpump. That collaborative campaigning spirit has led to an excellent result for communities in Africa."

"But we do believe in a free market, so if a new brand has been inspired by these efforts, I say - go for it! In seven years' time they can boast of the £7 million which has been raised by the One Foundation, then that will be truly amazing."

A perennially-tricky question is of the ethics of supporting Fairtrade, and other causes, through profit-making commerce. There has been a quite scandalous piece in a magazine criticising a company which had made an immense turnover by pioneering ethical coffee, and attacking the founder for now owning a Rolls Royce.

What should be the coffee house owner's attitude to profiting from ethically-sourced products?

"The whole concept of Fairtrade relies on the mechanism of trade, and the principle that working harder, better, more cleverly will bring rewards in the form of profits," answers James Roberts. "If I was running a high-street independent coffee-house, I would see the Fortnight as a great opportunity."

"I'd get as much supporting materials from suppliers as I could to maximise the impact of my campaign, and because the Fortnight is traditionally an occasion for customers to try new Fairtrade products, I'd certainly make sure I didn't miss out on any cross-selling or up-selling opportunities."

"Peros has grown strongly like this and, happily, we feel much better about ourselves knowing that we have achieved success while bringing many other benefits. If we can grow commercial business while being certain that we are helping more people, more of the time... then so far, so good!"

There's an interesting venture on the 'pound shop' theory from Cheltenham, where Tam Emirali has opened up the Bon Appetit 99, in which all food is under a pound. Apparently the portions aren't big, but we're told of one customer who bought and ate four meals, and thought he had still got a bargain. There is word of a second opening, in Dublin (with the concept changed to one and a half euros).

The director of the Loo of the Year awards, in which the café trade always fails to distinguish itself, has taken radical action for the 2012 awards, the 25th year of 'Britain's favourite competition'. He is now mailing coffee-houses direct to hustle them into entering the contest for 'the best places to go'. An indication of the way chains see the award is that JD Wetherspoon and McDonalds usually enter two hundred sites each.

The highly-regarded London café St Ali, which also runs the Sensory Lab brew-bar café, has re-branded as Workshop Coffee. The name is to 'reflect the company's artisan approach to speciality coffee and food'.

Clive Danby, formerly trade sales manager at Caffè Society, has become National Accounts Manager at Mokarabia, and has told us that he will be undertaking more trade marketing to raise awareness of the brand but also to generate enquiries from the trade. Asked by this magazine about the company's relatively low profile, Clive replied that Mokarabia is a family owned business with a multi-national company's capabilities and 300 years of know-how, and 1700 independent clients in the Greater London area - and 200 high street independent accounts in Dorset alone. It claims to be an Italian brand that can compete with all other Italian roasters, across the spectrum, with a programme of fortnightly deliveries from Italy.

There was a curious twist to a recent story in the Scottish press about complaints to the national rail service over the size of its beverages. A paper 'revealed' that ScotRail is now offering 8oz tea and coffee, down from the previous 12oz, with a reduction of only 10p from the previous price. There had previously been complaints about tea and coffee supplies running out, and the first curious quote in the story suggested that ScotRail had reduced the sizes 'so that more passengers can get one'. More entertainingly, the chairman of the Friends of the West Highland Lines, said: 'perhaps they are trying to cut down the number of visits to the toilets, which frequently run out of water on West Highland trains when the service is busy.' Five years ago, the train company replaced ground coffee with instant coffee, claiming that passengers preferred it, but later reversed the decision.

By contrast, and much farther south, Nick and Andy Stevens of Deal in Kent say they have seen an opening because of the lack of trolley services on the high-speed trains from their town to London, and have begun the Platform One coffee bar, open at 5.30am for the commuter trade.

The 'temperature-profile' machine goes into action

After all the debate about pressure-profiling in espresso machines, the first 'temperature-profile' machine by Rancilio has now arrived in the country, and has been installed at the Bermondsey Street coffee bar in London. This is the third Rancilio Xcelsius off the Italian production line.

The maker's argument that the taste of an espresso can be adjusted by changing the temperature of the brew water during the 25 seconds it takes for the extraction and pour. The 'pressure-profiling' concept argues that the pressure of that water can be changed during that same short time, with a noticeable effect on the resulting brew, and this is now generally accepted - the idea of adjusting the temperature is new. "This may be seen as a novelty, but everybody notices the difference," says Bill Davy of the Coffee Machine Company, which distributes Rancilio.

Adrian Jones at Street has an unusual approach to coffee-sourcing - the company buys Ethica, direct from Papua New Guinea, and he set up the new machine to test the effect with this coffee.

"He had one group running flat, pouring double shots at 92c," reports Bill Davy. "He had another group starting at 92c and dropping to 88c, and a third group starting at 92c and rising to 96c. The flat setting gave a result that was slightly bitter, and the one that rose became very bitter. The one that dropped turned out to be very smooth, and so they have set all groups to that."

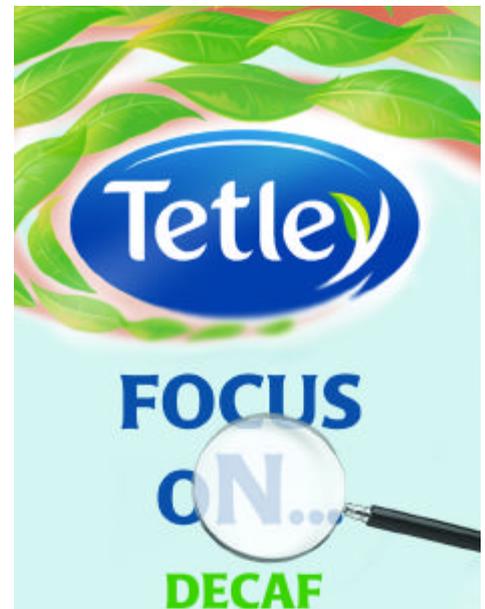
The Rancilio Xcelsius will make its formal debut at the London Coffee Festival. Baristas will be invited to bring their own house coffees along to test on the machine.

Meaningful twittering...

Claire Martinsen of Breckland Orchard, the artisan fruit juice maker mentioned before in this magazine, has won the FoodBev 2012 Best Social Media Campaign award for her use of online marketing.

In a trade characterised by online waffle, Claire tells us that she probably won for the content of her blog, to which she guides visitors from Twitter. "I made a deliberate change a few months back to give more advice, rather than just banging on about my brand. So I have written about tips for working food fairs and farmers markets, tips for exhibitions, tips for marketing, and tips for equipment. I use the 'Twitterverse' to highlight them, and as a result, my blog gets many more visitors than my website. I'm off to the US next week for a farm shop/deli convention, so I imagine most of March's blogs will be about retail tips from things I've seen in the US.

"I write them all, rather than the bland PR people who tweet for some companies! Maybe this is proof that little guys can come out on top sometimes - my marketing budget is nothing like the size of the other guys out there."



FOCUS ON... DECAF

All of the taste, none of the caffeine*
With many consumers looking to cut back on caffeine, stocking a decaf tea is becoming a necessity for many outlets. In retail, decaf tea is now bought by one out of ten households and is extremely popular with health conscious consumers. And, although traditional black tea has a very small caffeine element compared to coffee, there are many customers who are looking to cut caffeine out of their diet completely.

The key factor with any decaf tea is that it should have the same great taste as the traditional variant, but with none of the caffeine. Our blenders have worked wonders perfecting a full flavoured brew with all the natural goodness of tea, without the caffeine (0.2%). One sip of this delicious blend and your customers will see – the true taste of top quality tea.

Tetley Decaf is available in Drawstring Envelope formats from www.tetleyforcaterers.co.uk



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What to look for at Excel...

A commonsense attitude to coffee machines and some imaginative new ideas are promised for this year's Hotelympia – here is our guide to the likely cafe-relevant things to look for

Bravilor S3309

Bravilor is going to be showing the extension to its range of Rex Royal machines, and what will be interesting will be the 'newest generation of patented brewing unit'. What the maker says it has now achieved is bringing many components up to date while still retaining the qualities of being long-lasting and robust machines. An interesting feature will be what is said to be a particularly easy and convenient control system.

Café du Monde N2950

This will be the first chance for many people to see Café du Monde's new idea, Chez Toi.

It is a development of the Service en Chambre scheme, which gives hotel guests top-quality coffees to brew themselves in their rooms. The Chez Toi idea goes further - the caterers can promote Chez Toi tea and coffee to their customers for home consumption, with illustrated order booklets that the guests can take home.

As each booklet has an individual code which identifies the caterer who gave it, they receive a credit every time the customer orders coffee or tea for home use.

Ferns Coffee S2722

This is a company which has been roasting coffee in Hampshire since the 1890s - it is the name which has changed, since the buy-out of Layton Ferns, and a couple of recent company acquisitions. Managing director Justin Slawson has already launched over 50 new products and improved blends, and the company is investing heavily in new equipment and a wider distribution network.

The latest launch is Sassetta, a new 'light Neapolitan' style roast of Central American and African beans.

Fracino S2916

This is the UK's only manufacturer of espresso machines, and its appearance is intended to showcase its 55-strong portfolio of machines, with a current output of around 3,000 a year. One of the interesting features of the company, which is sited in the middle of the Birmingham industrial belt, was that it would always either make its own components, or turn to its neighbouring engineering companies. Now, Fracino has invested £250,000 in sheet metal production which allows it to manufacture even more of its own parts.



One of the extremely compact traditional espresso machines from La Cimbali, which can now also brew from pods and capsules, with the use of an optional group handle adaptation

La Cimbali S3219

There is a wonderfully challenging attitude to the La Cimbali appearance, the theme of which will come as no surprise to the quality coffee trade – the espresso machine maker will be highlighting the importance of quality coffee to the wider catering trades.

This, says the company, is the chance for hotel operators in particular to discover that it can be easy and cost-effective to offer fresh espresso-based coffee in virtually any hospitality situation. A 'great' cup of coffee can now be the big point of difference from other restaurants and hotels, says the brand, particularly as their guests now know the difference between good and average coffee perfectly well. La Cimbali will show the Q10, a fresh-milk bean-to-cup machine designed to be easy enough for hotel conference guests to operate by themselves. It is portable enough to move between meeting rooms.

There will also be the interesting new M29 Select Turbo, a compact traditional machine with an optional new capsule group handle and pod facility. La Cimbali will also show the new Magnum on-demand grinder.

Marco S3014

Marco is going to introduce the general hospitality trade to a concept which is already familiar in the specialist coffee houses – the brew bar.

Marco will recreate a typical brew bar on its stand, showing how single-cup brewing can be efficiently handled through a variety of different filter methods, from cafetières, Aeropresses to drippers. Baristas are invited to test the concept for themselves.

However, much of the interest will also be under the counter - Marco is

one of the companies leading the move to site much of its equipment beneath the worktop, and now both the Uber boiler and the Eco boiler can be positioned out of sight. It will be interesting to see the test showing of the new countertop font which features three flexible dispense heads, similar to the 'snakes' which is familiar from pub bars. The company wants practical feedback from baristas and bar staff before deciding on its production specification.



Look under the counter at Marco

Nelson S1529

Another familiar name which is experimenting with under-the-counter models is Nelson, the ware-washing specialist.

The interesting aspects of the machines on show are the energy-saving aspects, notably the way the machine uses heat from waste water to heat incoming water, more so than any other similar machine.

The undercounter dishwasher takes only three litres of water per cycle, but to compensate for this, the wash arm rotates exceptionally fast and produces better-aimed and wider-reaching water jets.

Synchro has not entirely re-invented the wheel...

Hotelympia STAND S3046

...just improved it!

Made by an engineer from a 'name' brand, who felt he could build a better machine... and went out and did so! Marco Brutti has taken a proven concept, taken the best proven components, improved some of them, put his own personal stamp on the result, and now offers a very fine new espresso machine at a competitive price. See the Synchro at Hotelympia, or at Teknomat's new Room 71 demonstration suite in Buckinghamshire.

TEKNOMAT Machines for Great
www.teknomat.co.uk 01844339828

Newby Teas N3046

Newby will be showing the concept of flowering teas, very familiar in the highest-class tea-rooms, but remarkably still unknown by many parts of the hospitality trade. The flowering tea is a hand-made combination of green tea leaves and flowers, very carefully tied together - when placed in the hot brewing water, the tea leaves unfurl, creating an eye-catching visual display. The craftspeople who put these items together can create a surprising number of different visual effects, depending on the tea and flowers used. It is of course a highly-visual effect, which the hospitality trade has to show to full effect - the clear pot has to be as carefully chosen as the flowering tea, but the result is well worth it. It captivates the customers every time!

Peros S2930

Peros is the biggest supplier of Fairtrade and ethically-sourced beverages and snack items to the catering trade. It will launch its new catalogue, which also includes case studies and background information to help operators to tell the story of ethically-sourced items. There will be additions to the Eros coffee range and updates to the One World bakery range, together with a new collection of disposable cups, dinnerware and food containers.

Sielaff S3046

Sielaff will show Piacere Touch, a touch-screen version of its bean-to-



Don't miss the profit in flowering teas, says Newby

cup machine. The Piacere is available with dual grinders for a choice of coffees, with a chilled fresh milk module or a soluble whitener hopper. The Combimat is an innovative merchandiser, which combines spirals and conveyor shelves in the same machine, a unique configuration. The top two shelves use traditional spirals for snacks and confectionery; the others use a conveyor feed mechanism, and the result combines sales of snacks and confectionery or cold drinks from one machine.

Vegware N2702

This is the pioneer of eco-friendly disposable beverage cups, and will be offering its new buying guide, to help buyers know what to look for when considering eco-packaging.

"There's more and more on the market, but a lot of it just 'looks' eco, so it's important to understand what to demand," says the company. "There are four important issues to consider when choosing a supplier, and this is what we will be featuring on our stand. We won't be the only packaging people at the show, but we definitely will be the only plastic-free ones with full compostability certification for everything and a genuine solution for our customers' waste!" The major aspects of the buying guide will discuss the difference between compostable and biodegradable, the importance of certification to prove what a supplier claims, the value of the Food Waste Network, and the importance of 'eco audits'. Vegware says customers saved over 260 tonnes of carbon and 200 tonnes of virgin materials in 2011.

Vivreau N2829

This is one of the pioneers of worktop dispense taps - the latest development includes a 'futuristic' new control system.

Winterhalter N1320

There will be something unique to see on this stand.

Winterhalter has mounted a camera inside a machine so visitors can see what goes on during a wash cycle. Winterhalter will also have a chemical laboratory showing how its chemicals cope with different types of water hardness and how chemicals can affect washing. This brand is another developing undercounter systems.

WMF N2110

Although this is a very well known name in coffee brewing, it is also a specialist in what it calls 'solutions for the Coffee Occasion'.

This refers to the Solutions collection from Tafelstern, a fine porcelain range to enhance coffee service.

It is a modular system which allows operators to present a wide variety of accompanying small plates of sweet or savoury items in a highly co-ordinated manner. Items include rectangular shaped plates and platters, for best use of space on table and in storage, and gently conically-fluted cups to enhance the aroma of the coffee.

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Synchronicity

Teknomat S3046

It's an old story, but it always keeps coming up, as surely as independent engineers have minds of their own... there was an engineer working for a 'name' brand of espresso machines, who thought he could build a better machine. So he went out and did so, and the result can be seen at this year's Hotelympia.

The engineer was a chap called Marco Brutti, and his idea was that instead of starting from a blank sheet of paper, the best way to design a new espresso machine was to take the best proven components in the industry, improve them where he could, and produce a new espresso machine which was effectively the sum total of a series of improvements. The aim was a very fine new espresso machine at a competitive price, and the result is the Synchro, which can be seen distributed by Teknomat.

"The old slogan is 'why fix what's not broken', and by utilising quality proven parts and full control over the production process, he's tweaked a proven concept and put his own stamp on it, and is able to offer it at a competitive price against the 'badge' names, and much lower than the 'hip' brands," says Mike Graham of Teknomat.

The pricing, he says, is not done by cutting corners.

"Cheaper manufacturers are usually able to reduce their costs by producing boilers and copper pipe work out of thinner metal. The copper used in the Synchro is thicker, and the group heads are the original brass four-kilo E61 heads, rather than the 1.8kg copies employed by cheaper manufacturers. He also uses a larger boiler with elongated heat exchangers to produce a machine with greater thermal stability.

"All these factors contribute to stable brew temperatures at the group heads without the necessity to spend more money than one has to."

There is a certain amount of disagreement in the espresso trade over the general desire for 'cool' brand machines. Outside of those coffee-houses who desperately want to be 'cool', there does appear to be a back-to-basics movement of those who want to reclaim the simple principles of great espresso.



"Having inspected a typical 'hip' machine, I was initially enthused at the design and the innovative aesthetics, but disappointed at the standard of the build quality," remarks Mike Graham. "I picked up the drip tray and turned it over to find one of the most crude pieces of welding I had seen in a long time. Some of them are in such low-volume production that there is not the justification to invest in quality tooling.

"My suspicion is certain machines are specified by designers and architects to impress clients who know little about coffee, and are sold to clients who have too much money and want to impress people."

By contrast, he argues, the Synchro is a practical machine. "Marco Brutti has not reinvented the wheel, as so many new manufacturers think they have, he's merely improved it.

"I am in the school which agrees that temperature is critical when making coffees. Good infusion temperature is really to do with heat retention and thickness of metals. We have a larger 14-litre boiler with elongated heat exchangers to produce a machine with greater thermal stability, the copper is thicker, the group heads are the original brass, and the box chassis helps the thermal stability as the 3.5mm steel stops heat evaporating at too great a rate. All these factors contribute to stable brew temperatures at the group heads without the necessity to spend more money than one has to.

"So the decision is, whether the extra cost of a 'cool' machine is worth the outlay for the customer, and for how much benefit, over a traditional design."

Roasting in progress, outside the main hall...

A very curious aspect of this year's show is that one of the most interesting coffee-related things to be seen is at Excel, but not part of the show... it is the Andronicas concept of in-house roasting, which can be seen in the Boulevard area of the Excel centre. (So far as we are concerned, it is important for beverage operators, and so we include it!)

"We are coffee roasters and industry suppliers with a genuine understanding of the issues affecting coffee bars - anyone interested in seeing our roasting machine in operation could take the time to visit AWoC at ExCel, we will show them the roaster in action and give them a coffee to remember!" says Andronicas' Andrew Knight.

How important is in-house roasting likely to be? A green coffee importer said to us this month: 'the artisan-differentiated coffee houses appear to be managing the economic downturn best - that is, both cafes roasting in-house or cafes buying in from the new cadre of specialty roasters'. To what degree does roasting now constitute a part of that differentiation?

"It is about attitude. Do you care? If you care about roasting, you care about taste which means you care about the barista's skills, you care about cleaning the machine, changing the water filter and the grinder discs. You know how long your shot takes, and the difference in taste from a ten-second shot to a 25-second shot. Or do you just pump out brown liquid and hope?"

To what degree does a certain amount of in-house roasting insulate an operator from the vagaries of coffee-pricing?

"The increase in the raw coffee cost has been dramatic, but on a cost-per-cup basis it is still negligible. The problem here is that the trade's coffee suppliers are running scared and are frightened to increase to the levels they should - in trying to maintain margin they put ever-increasing proportions of cheap coffee in their blends and convince themselves it tastes good, but it doesn't... it's mind-boggling the ignorance that exists with such a fundamentally important item in foodservice today!

"In-house roasting enables the operator to say what he has in the blend and promote it. Accessing a good range of quality green coffee is relatively simple, and if enough people in the coffee business just wanted it to happen, we could all roast coffee freshly, we could know what we were selling, and give the customer that information."

It always used to be argued that in-house roasting provided some of its own promotion - at the very least, should roaster-retailers have posters screaming: 'come in and watch this being done before your very eyes!'

"If you really are doing in-house roasting, it's not necessary - the smell will tell everybody what you are doing, and that's it." (And, adds Andrew Knight wickedly, it also differentiates you from those businesses who just pretend to do their own roasting!)

Realistically, what would a beverage operator have to invest in roasting?

"It's a serious investment, certainly £20,000, but like any equipment situation, funding is available. And the life of a roaster is more than 10 years, so think of it as a self-financing opportunity. Assume you can pay for the roaster with the savings over ready-roasted beans. You will know what you have in your blend, and you'll know when it was roasted.

"And in any event - it is so much more fun!"

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Rocket S2919

What does the beverage operator really want from an espresso machine? How about this definition - 'a stronger, safer machine that's easier and cheaper to service, has great longevity, with a greater temperature stability resulting in a better, more consistent espresso. Quality, reliability, value for money, design, simplicity of use and consistency of performance'.

Not a reference to any of the modern-day espresso buzzwords in there at all, says the new importer of the Rocket machine. Instead, they speak only of "a high-quality, no-nonsense espresso machine that goes back to the basics of good, uncomplicated espresso making. It's a new machine for people who really understand about espresso-making but who aren't interested in gimmicks."

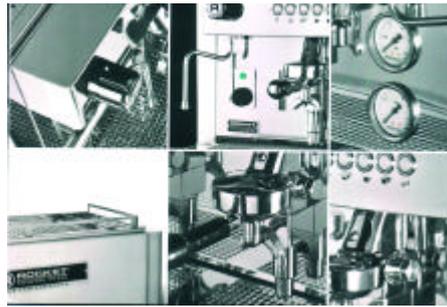
When *Coffee House* first saw this machine, we couldn't resist saying to the importer that its design is delightfully utilitarian - it looks the least-flashy espresso machine we've seen for a long time.

"Spot-on!" came the ready reply. "We call it 'contemporary with under-stated class', but it has been described as 'sexy'. Certainly, to spend a fortune on the fit-out of your new bar and then to have a machine that tries to steal the show by being the centre of attention is like going to a wedding and dressing to out shine the bride... bad form! But if you went to a coffee-house or bar and saw this, you'd definitely want a coffee off this machine."

Rocket is a development of the domestic espresso machines built by ECM in Italy in the 1980's. Two New Zealanders recently bought the rights to build those machines, with a view to making 'the finest handmade espresso machines, with meticulous care and attention to detail'.

"We have a list of small improvements which, added together, make this a machine that not only produces a high quality coffee, but also gives reduced long-term service costs and greater reliability," says the importer.

A Rocket launch!



"There's an isolator on the steam taps - so the machines can still operate whilst taps are serviced. There's a hot water tempering valve, which balances hot water from the boiler with cold water from the mains, so that when you open the water valve you get a single stream without the usual splashing experienced with water at 100c.

"Pre-infusion improves the coffee extraction, and this has two systems, static and electronic.

"Each group weighs 5.3kg - is this the heaviest in the industry? It gives exceptional thermal stability and remarkable consistency in the coffee.

"There is no touch pad, but each button is individual, similar to those you find on cash machines or lifts, resulting in longer life and low cost servicing."

A lot of work has gone into the steam wand.

"The steam wand is stainless and insulated, therefore safe to touch. It is double skinned, which is expensive, but a very important safety feature. The nozzle is designed for easy steaming and can be fitted with 2, 3 or 4 holes in the wand (these are available as accessories).

"The advantage of the double skin is that only the nozzle gets hot. This eliminates the problem of milk scorching and baking onto the wand as well as being an important safety feature.

"The large boiler and heat exchanger both give greater temperature stability, the boiler has a drain for easier servicing and inspections, and two anti-vacuum systems which work independently to prevent boiler contamination.

"The PID temperature control on the boiler gives greater accuracy and replaces the mechanical pressure stat, there's a choice of 3, 4, 5 or 6 kw elements giving greater flexibility in specifying for a particular location, the heating element has its electronic protection which eliminates element failure, and the heavyweight, stainless steel body has no plastic parts, giving longer life.

"It all adds up to a stronger, safer machine that's easier and cheaper to service, and which has great longevity.

It is not, says the importer, a machine that says 'good morning' and tells you the time and the date! Instead, the Rocket is promoted as a high quality, no-nonsense espresso machine that goes back to the basics of good, uncomplicated espresso making.

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As well as supplying grinders and knockout drawers, Fracino can now supply any traditional coffee machine to operate with the capsule system for all formats. Most of our two and three group machines can now be fitted with the Fast Froth system which allows the operator to automatically heat a jug of either frothed or foamed milk to the correct temperature thereby avoiding the common problem of overheating milk with a traditional steam arm.

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What exactly is the value of flavoured syrups to a coffee house?

In the super-geek fraternity, the answer will be nothing - the top baristas either dismiss the idea of flavours entirely, or make their own. But in the average high-street bar, interest in the use of proprietary, branded, out-of-the-bottle flavours is going up. It was probably a 'first' this year when Barry Cook of Cafelicious in Swindon dared to be a high-street independent barista using a bottled flavour at the barista championship - he not only used a proprietary flavouring in his signature drink, but went even further and used two, a crème brulee in his piccolo and a vanilla in the cream topping.

According to John Taylerson of Malmesbury Syrups, currently the most outspoken advocate for the flavour sector, it is perfectly reasonable to look beyond the obvious questions of syrups - what flavours there are, and how authentic they are - and concentrate for a while on the purely financial aspect of it.

Surely, we asked, the taste comes first?

"Does it? Profitability follows customer satisfaction - the customer has to enjoy the experience, so don't think of the coffee house experience as just food and drink. We're in the entertainment business, in a world in which twenty minutes playing with an i-phone is the equivalent of Starbucks original idea of twenty minutes in 'the third place'.

"We're going further than 'just' taste. We're talking in terms of letting the customer have fun. This is the opposite of that famous YouTube clip video about self-important baristas, which wasn't without a grain of truth! We must take our product seriously, but allows ourselves to have fun.

"Our melted Easter bunny drink was a fun promotion which asked: 'what happens if you slaughter the Easter bunny?' Of course, it was another way of drawing attention to the chocolate flavour. It has been the same with the hot-cross bun flavour - we've actually labelled the syrup as such, and the trading standards people have not come down on us for it yet. The flavour is fruity and cinnamon, and the smell probably gives the theme more than the taste. It is going down well, and it's

Bring on the melted Easter bunnies...



Flavoured syrups are a very serious product - but you should have fun with them!

the name 'hot-cross bun latte' that gets the attention. The hot-cross bun flavour allows the opportunity of several different drinks around the Easter theme.

"Promotion is fun with the specials board - remember the East End example of 'latte, shot of curry flavour, 30p extra!' I'm very fond of good point-of-sale, and I'm also becoming very fond of QR codes, which allow people to 'discover' something... you make more money when a customer says 'ooh, I'll try that'. Promoting a flavour is no longer just a case of sticking something on a specials board.

"And just as with jokes, it's all in the timing. As the Christmas flavours are gone by January, so in comes the Easter Bunny for spring."

Olympic year may bring in some unexpected opportunities for themes, says Taylerson.

"We are currently having success with our British theme, because people are picking up on the fact that our syrups are made here, and more operators are telling us that this adds to the interest, and the theatre.

"Historically, putting the Union Jack on your label has not been what people wanted... but it is now thought that view is changing. We're careful not to over-do it, but to make sure it does grab the initial attention, which is what you have to do.

"We also hear from small chains who are seeking out British products and more authentic products to push the message about being different from the big groups. This may become the battlefield for a while."

But are flavours serious money makers?

"To stress the 'novelty' items would trivialise it and miss the more serious question of getting customers to try something different. Trying one new thing moves them on to others, and then you begin to have a customer who

says: 'what else have you got?'"

And that, argues Taylerson, is where the bottled flavour makes its mark.

"For the barista community, making your own syrups is fine, and shows off a great skill. However, when you have a queue of customers in front of you, saying 'c'mon, mate, let's be having it', the proprietary flavour is the correct business model.

"This is not about do's and don'ts, or about artistic temperament. The ultimate arbiter of taste in a commercial situation is - the man with money in his pocket."

Which, argues Taylerson, brings in the importance of the value of syrups.

"The economics are overwhelming. Talking to customers and looking at what other industry commentators say supports our view that a typical coffee house might have around 300+ people

through their door during an average day. The average individual customer is probably worth just over three pounds.

"Each customer paying out for a flavoured coffee increases profit. The big chains know this - look how busy they've been with the promotion of flavoured coffee.

"So, if a flavoured coffee/beverage is 30-40 pence extra and one in three sales reflects this additional spend, multiply that across a year and it could add up to around an extra £10-£15k of turnover. Remember that 50-60% of that is straight profit, and you can see why the big players are embracing flavours and syrups."

But, argues Taylor, profitability only comes with promotional effort. The example of the Easter bunny is a serious example of what can be continued throughout the year. The two keys are promotion and getting the staff behind it.

Remember the need for consistency in drinks, says Taylerson.

"Some operators say 'syrups are expensive, we don't want to put too much in' - well, that won't feel like value to the customer. We have looked at what works and what the big chains do, and on the basis that a pumped shot is about 10ml of syrup, they use two pumps in a small cup, three pumps in a medium and four in a large.

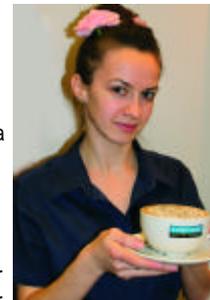
"But not all syrups are the same and the subjective nature of taste means that what is 'enough' for one barista is not nearly enough for another. We also find that the more natural the flavour, the more variable they might be, and temperature, coffee strength, bitterness, time of day and many other factors all affect the way we perceive flavour.

"The trick is to make sure you have tried and tested all your recipes and that your staff have too."



Branded syrups have cropped up a couple of times in recent barista contests, not just the UKBC.

Zorana Simic (right) has won the Esquires chain in-house barista contest, with a signature drink featuring a proprietary flavoured syrup. Zorana, who works in the chain's Shepherds Bush branch, created the Oreo Penguincino (the penguin is the Esquires house character!) The drink featured a double espresso, a shot of Essenz vanilla syrup, two teaspoons of a blended Oreo cookie (a trick used by milkshake makers) and macchiato-style froth.



It was the lack of a particular syrup in a Costa branch which won the brand's in-house contest for franchisees. Tracey Jones, a catering supervisor at the RAF museum in Cosford, noticed that her branch used no orange syrup, and decided to put this right by creating a chocolate orange mocha signature drink. The drink was said to have 'the feel of an alcohol-free mulled wine'. The recipe will be offered to other franchised outlets.

Littles, the Devonshire roaster which specialises in flavoured instant coffee, has now sold over one million jars since starting up in the UK five years ago. Founder Henry Little has remarked that a million may not seem like a large number to some, but considering he only sells to independent and speciality retailers, the figure is really quite immense.

There is one sector of the coffee trade which continues to grow, although not without problems. It is the mobile cafe - and despite the endless rows with local councils who don't approve of the sites some baristas want to use, there is no shortage of would-be caterers looking for coffee carts.

The image of the 'cart' is typified by the Piaggio Ape (the Italian word for 'bee', because of its sound!) which was invented in the late 40s by the guy who came up with the Vespa scooter. But mobile coffee trading is also done from full-sized vans, from trailers, from handcarts, from small hatchback cars, and from 'stop me and buy one' bikes. The growth is such that Barbara Croce of Coffee Latino, the 'cart' supplier of Tyne and Wear, won two business awards this autumn - North East 'Best Small Business' of the year, and the North East Woman Entrepreneur of the year. In 2011, Barbara converted and delivered mobile units of various kinds to Australia, America, Canada, Germany, France, Dubai, Ireland, Iceland and Switzerland, as well as all over the UK.

"We honestly believe that we are leading the way," Barbara told Coffee House. "We are taking on steel and sheet metal workers at a time when this industry in the north east is collapsing in the recession."

Why do people opt for a mobile business? It's hard work at the best of times, and on a wet day, it can be an awful experience.

"It is not all about the romance of being out there on your own... but it does help that on a really bad day, you certainly have the option of simply not going to work!

"For a lot of people who have lost their jobs, this is a cheap set-up into working for yourself - a Piaggio can be £50 a week. We find this is a big reason."

However, it is fraught with problems. There have been big discussions about the best mobile trading areas, and big rows with local authorities about whether or not Piaggios and trikes could be sited in pedestrian malls. It is also possible to get a trading site horribly wrong - and new would-be mobile traders know none of this.

"The people who come to us rarely know what their target is, or what their best vehicle is," acknowledges Barbara Croce. "So we show them how to research likely areas.

"The worst thing you can do is tie yourself into a site rental and think it's going to be easy, because you can't give up after a week.

"For some reason, bus stations are often no good. You'd think the same would go for Metro stations, but they work, and so do train stations. You have to think of 'where the cappuccino and latte people go'.

"We have a client at a commuter station in London who starts at 6am, fin-

Trading heaven in a handcart?



The rush to become a mobile barista goes on - but what is the right vehicle? And can a bike really give more selling space than a van?

ishes at 11, does two kilos of coffee in five hours and makes a very tidy sum.

"We have a guy outside a swimming pool. You wouldn't think it works, with machines inside selling coffee for a pound, but it does - they prefer to come out and have a fresh latte.

"We have a retired supermarket manager outside a train station that does three trains an hour. For a retired gentleman, it's OK - but even so, he has slowly built it up, he does about £80 a day, and he's as happy as Larry. The customers now come early for their train, so they can buy a coffee first.

"We have another client who was very worried after his first week at a Metro station - but he persevered, and he took the time and made the effort to build up rapport with the people, and now he's doing alright."

Barbara Croce does not franchise a coffee business, nor does she promise that things will go well, but she will offer practical advice.

"If they want to open on a business park, we show how they can go around and give away free coffee for the first day or two - they're horrified at that, but a hundred coffees is only a kilo, and we can prove that this works a lot more effectively than an ad in the local paper or dropping a flier through an office door."

Trading permissions are a particular problem, she agrees.

"Every council is different, and I can't always know every local licensing law, so I advise new start-ups to speak to their local council first. Every one really is different - I can show you two towns right next to each other which have totally different ideas, one which has no such thing as a trading licence, next to one which charges £1,200 a year and pinpoints exactly where you can trade."

Can there be too many outdoor traders? The Mary Portas report

appeared to advocate that anyone should be able to get out and do business on the street.

"I have been to streets where you couldn't move for burger vans, kebab vans, and donut vans... but if you do it properly, it can look very nice. Look at the towns in Germany which do it very well.

"If you are clearly bringing something to the site, it's a good thing."

Here, suggests Barbara Croce, her trading bikes have allowed coffee traders to get in where a van would probably not have been allowed. Hers are pedal-powered trikes, which have been shown at Caffe Culture in partnership with Fracino, who supply her dual-fuel espresso machines.

These are the old-fashioned Dutch 'bakfietsen', still largely made to a design which is a century old. They are virtually indestructible and yet relatively easy to pedal and handle... and well-sprung, because they were designed for unpaved roads.

"Councils will often say that in spaces where they don't want a burger van, a trike will do nicely. The National Trust have said that trikes fit perfectly into their parks. And you may be more likely to get a site if you show that you are being more considerate of the environment."

(Some people are already using the solar-powered trikes - they don't entirely pay for themselves, but are seen by licensing authorities as 'doing

the right thing').

Curiously, a trike offers better trading space than a small van. Such is the space problem with tiny vans that Barbara Croce has completely redesigned the back of the standard Piaggio.

"The trikes are longer than a Piaggio, and are open all round. The standard Piaggio may look 'quirky', but there's no working space, and they're too low - if you're over 5ft 6in, you have a lot of bending.

"We have now fabricated an entirely new rear for the Piaggio. We copied the fibreglass mould, raised it 700mm, opened it up on three sides, and we now have the biggest Piaggio, with a working area the size of a double bed. It's bigger than a Mega Van, and if you can only trade out of the back, that's OK, and if you can only serve out of one side, that's still OK.

"It cost us thousands to do, but we've just installed the first one - in Colorado!"

For 2012, says Barbara Croce, enthusiasm for the mobile trade is likely to continue, and so will her developments. The next will be the launch of her ice cream café, a traditional Italian vehicle selling gelato and espresso.

The first order has been taken, and again... the vehicle is bound for the States.



The latest mobile coffee service, using what appears to be a SmartCar, is GoGoGaggia, created by Jocelyn Robinson of Yorkshire, in association with Raj Beadle of Caffe Shop Ltd, who of course used to be MD of Gaggia UK and still distributes the brand. The machine is the Gaggia GD two-group compact, which sits just inside the rear hatchback, the coffee and ancillaries are all by Gaggia, the baked goods are by the lady's mum, and the intention now is to open up a GoGoGaggia franchise.

Like so many others, Jocelyn has entered the coffee trade after being made redundant, in her case from being a lawyer working for Manchester police. She actually is both a qualified barrister and a trained barista!

Although you've still got a page left, we hope you've enjoyed the latest issue of the coffee trade's top news magazine. Never miss your copy of the trade's fullest and best news magazine - subscribe now!

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Computer gamers promote 9-bean coffee

An unusual espresso blend which has aroused conflicting views in the coffee trade has become the subject of an imaginative promotion – it has been taken up as the house espresso of an unusual coffee shop which is using it for a charity-based promotion among the computer-games fraternity. The gaming wholesaler distributing it is also behind an extremely strange new set of teabags.

The coffee is the nine-bean blend from Base Coffee, and the café is Loading, an extremely unusual small venue for computer games geeks in south Cornwall. The charity is Special Effect, which works to help people with disabilities enjoy computer games as part of rehabilitation activities.

The promotion has involved the coffee being packed in a most unusual visual format, certainly with an imaging more aligned to the computer trade than the beverage trade. The packaging includes a 'retro inspired manual' on how to make coffee, together with a discount voucher redeemable from some 'gaming apparel' specialists. The coffee is priced at £14.99 for 250gm, and ninepence goes to the charity.

For those not involved in the gaming fraternity, we feel it necessary to explain that 'retro' in this context means 'going back ten years'.

The coffee has inspired a certain amount of discussion within the coffee trade, with arguments both for it and against it. In brief, the combination is of Brazilian, Colombian, Honduran, El Salvador, Indian Mysore, Ethiopian Sidamo and Djimmah, Sumatran, and a Papua New Guinea robusta.

The argument for the blend is an unusual one, that it has no 'sweet spot'. Rather, the argument is that the complexity of it allows for more or less infinite variation, allowing a barista to experiment with it and achieve a high number of different results. The counter argument from several roasters is that any more than four beans brings the danger of losing balance and definition of taste.



Gamers' coffee and the unusual Royaltea teabags.

The Firebox gaming wholesale business, which is promoting the Loading coffee, is also the distributor for an extremely curious new set of die-cut teabags.

This is Royaltea, which allows for the dunking of various members of the royal family on the bag tags. When this magazine asked which teabag maker had managed to achieve the shaped teabags, we found there is more than meets the eye to these irreverent royal teabags. They're not British at all - they're made by Donkey Products of Hamburg.

Firebox has also attracted attention from the coffee trade for offering kopi luwak coffee, over which there is now growing disquiet in some parts of the industry. One of the main protestors against the coffee, barista Mike Haggerton of Perthshire, has now created a list of British suppliers who stock the coffee, and has asked them to stop – there have now been cases of trade suppliers agreeing to delist the item.

An interesting customer-service cautionary tale from Taiwan tells of the man who died at his table while playing a video game at an internet café - and who was not discovered for nine hours. A waitress said she saw him talking on his phone at noon; we wonder if her manager asked why she had not tried to sell him anything until the late evening.



Kaldi

Quite wonderfully, tea has been the theme of a pub pantomime. The Star pub in Dorking usually runs music, poetry and plays, but has now presented Ali Baba and the Four Tea Thieves.

The plot centred on the most popular tea shop in ancient Persia, preparing for the annual Persian Tea contest - the proprietors had to fight off competition from Lapsang Souchong, leader of the four tea thieves, of whom the other three were his mistress Red Bush, Earl Grey, and the evil leader's main henchman, Tetley.

Costa Coffee is to open in Tiverton. The local press reports that it will be on the vacant site of a 'stationary' shop. No pop-up site, this, then...

A shopper has complained to Sainsbury's over its offer of two packs of Taylors beans for £6 - he pointed out that this was 2p more expensive than buying the two packs separately for £2.99 each.

Kaldi is indebted to Toby Frere of Fere's in Dorset for this gem of customer reaction, which is of course not untypical. A customer complained that he asked for a cappuccino, which wasn't what he'd been given. Why not? "Because you didn't scoop foam into it..."

Kaldi is now able to 'announce', for want of a less-presumptuous expression, that his fairly irreverent book on the trade will be launched at the Caffe Culture show in May.

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