

# Boughton's

## COFFEE HOUSE



October 2013

### Le Meridien acts to change the image of hotel coffee

The international hotel chain Le Meridien has taken a great step towards improving the general standard of hotel coffee, the appalling quality of which counts as almost legendary in the coffee trade. This magazine has discovered that the chain will work on great coffee as a point of difference for itself around the world.

Virtually every top-brand supplier to the British coffee trade protests about the state of coffee, and the way it is treated in even five-star hotels – the reason is partly economy and partly poor training, but it is universally agreed by the coffee trade that general hotel coffee is, at best, poor.

Now, a Le Meridien survey of hotel customers has attracted the attention of the worldwide press, though the general media missed the main business point, predictably concentrating on the finding that 73 per cent of respondents would give up sex, TV and internet in a hotel for the perfect cup of coffee.

However, we thought we saw something deeper in this, and challenged Brian Povinelli, global brand leader at Le Meridien, as to whether he is leading a charge to change the image of hotel coffee in general.

Speaking exclusively to Coffee House, he agreed that it is true – Le Meridien has accepted that hotel coffee around the world is not what it should be, has seen it as a point of difference, and has now created a programme through which it intends to



A cool espresso bar? It's also Le Meridien's reception area in Bangkok

train a hundred staff up to the stage of 'master barista'. The overall trainer will be Fritz Storm, the world barista champion in 2002, working with Meriden's coffee supplier, Illy.

A Master Barista will lead the coffee standards at each hotel, and serve as a coffee expert and ambassador for both guests and locals. This onsite expert will even be required to repeat all levels of coffee training on an annual basis.

In a quite radical second part of the programme, Meridien will now redesign its foyers as 'a re-interpretation of the traditional lobby into The Hub, a coffee-house environment'.

This involves such new ideas as bringing features like the reception and concierge desks into the 'coffee-house' area.

"We have changed the traditional hotel lobby," Meridien told us. "The Hub will be a social gathering place offering a dynamic coffee-house atmosphere where a speciality cup of coffee stimulates conversation and creativity by drawing guests to the sights, sounds, and scents of the coffee bar, with a skilled barista crafting signature coffees."

Why do so many hotels get coffee wrong?

"I think coffee is often treated as an afterthought by hoteliers around the world," Brian Povinelli told us. "I think that many hotels have not figured out an operationally effective way to deliv-

er great coffee to guests every time. Honestly, some boutique hotels and small chains are better at it, but it's still a challenge for the industry as a whole."

What must the hotel industry do to correct the situation?

"Identify great partners – Illy have helped us to crack the code to deliver a consistent, high-quality experience across the globe, in which all hotel associates, behind the bar or back of house, truly understand how to make a good cup of coffee, and have respect for the process."

Does Le Meridien see itself as taking a leading role in putting the global hotel coffee situation right?

"We do believe that Le Meridien is one of the first global hospitality brands to implement brand-wide initiatives to result in a better coffee experience for our guests. We have launched the Master Barista programme in a hundred hotels around the world, and we believe we now in a unique position to capture those who appreciate coffee."

"What really sets us apart from other hotels, and even the travel industry as a whole, is the way we view coffee. We view it as an art and an integral part of the brand's culture, rather than a commodity that a hotel 'has' to offer. The premium coffee experience is often neglected not only in hotels, but also on planes, trains and even restaurants. We're hoping our coffee initiatives will help change all that."

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If you are a new reader, welcome to the coffee trade's liveliest monthly magazine. You simply don't get trade stories like this anywhere else!

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A 'huge' fire in St Ives, Cornwall, has involved the Vintage tea room - seven fire appliances went to the scene, where several catering businesses operate side by side on the seafront. It is believed the fire may have started at a neighbouring take-away snack bar.

The ShakeTastic chain has won the live finals of the smoothie championships, with the Popeye recipe - fans of the cartoon will realise that this involves spinach, but also banana and apple. The chain also won the title in 2009 and 2010. "We have had spinach on our menu for over a year," the chain's managing director Josh Kettle told us. "It is popular, but not the most popular! The reason it is good is using the right ratio of ingredients. We are very generous in our portions, which could be one of the factors that sets us apart from the rest."

Steven Prime of Esquires coffee houses, Coventry, has won the HSBC Young Franchisee of the Year award. The category is for franchisees aged 30 and under, and is intended to 'celebrate their enterprising nature'. Steven Prime was recognised for supporting local businesses, educational institutions, and being heavily involved in charity work.

The opening up of My Coffee Stop in Shepton Mallett provided a puzzle for the partners - they had intended to give away free coffees to christen the arrival of their new espresso machine, but were surprised when tasters insisting on paying. Partner Karen Mercer told the local press: "we wanted to let people try the cof-

fee and talk about how nice it tastes but people kept wanting to pay. I was saying 'no, no', but they said they wanted to support local business! I tried again the next day to give away free coffee, getting people off the street who wouldn't have come in, but they paid for it... after that happened several times we decided to just start charging!"

The 'East London coffee experience in Nottingham' is the ambition of the new Wired coffee bar in Pelham Street, says the local press. This is one of the newest arrivals to a project called 'the creative quarter', an area which is intended to 'have a high concentration of key emerging sectors to create a high-value clustering effect' and 'to celebrate and connect Nottingham's creative, arts and digital business communities'. Incoming businesses are being encouraged by ideas such as enhanced rates relief. The Wired bar is to be opened by Trés and Vanessa Gretton-Roche, as 'an independent artisan coffee bar appealing to the switched-on, culturally aware and discerning customer'.

The Harris and Hoole chain is reported to have made its first moves in a strategy of opening in transport hubs. Co-founder Nick Tolley has been reported as saying that he hopes to have over twenty stores by the end of this year, and to open a similar number next year. The chain has suffered its first branch closure - its shop in Ruislip is to cease trading, less than a year after opening. Eleven staff members will keep their jobs but be transferred to other shops.

## Cafes need to improve the etiquette of serving, says the BSA

Following their criticism of the state of espresso served in British cafes, the Beverage Standards Association has now identified two further areas in which it believes caterers can improve their beverage service.

Speaking before the announcement of this year's awards (later this month), head judge Ranald Paterson told *Coffee House* that cafes owners must overcome a lack of practical machine knowledge.

"A regular irritation is not being given a glass of water beside an espresso, or a napkin, however cheap, beside a cappuccino," he said. "Simple etiquette of beverage service is still lacking in many places, and would make a big difference to the standard of service."

He also questioned the technical knowledge of many café owners.

"Our criticisms are getting through - more operators now recognise the importance of a good espresso as the

base of other drinks. However, scalding of milk remains common, and we feel that café operators should know more about their machines.

"Too few know how to adjust their grinders, water volume, or temperature. This is a fact."

It is expected that of just over 200 entries for this year's awards, nine or ten may achieve the top 'five-cup' standard.

"The interesting thing about this is that half of them are new winners. The most encouraging feature of the awards is the number of people who have moved in from other jobs or industries, and have done well - we have found some new gems."



The Theobrama coffee and chocolate chain of Australia is to open up in the UK - it has taken a site in the Touchwood shopping centre in Solihull, and also offers several franchise opportunities in London. The chain already has franchises in Saudi Arabia, Singapore and China, and is expanding into New Zealand and Malaysia. The concept was initially developed by two partners in Melbourne, who decided that the area was 'coffee-d out' and decided to turn instead to quality chocolate. Before opening, they studied the chocolate market in Europe and visited chocolatiers in Belgium to understand the sector. One curiosity of their service is the chocolate mugwarmer (pictured) - it seems to work with a little tea-light candle.

The Hearing Dogs for the Deaf organisation has launched the admirably-titled project 'who lets the dogs in?', to highlight the need for more welcome and understanding of those who need the help of such assistance dogs. A study by the organisation has found that over 80 per cent of deaf people have been denied access to high street shops because of their dogs, and more than 55 per cent have been barred from cafes, with many caterers citing health and safety reasons as justification for not letting them in. (As we have reported on several occasions before, this excuse has to be used with extreme caution).

By contrast, the Bluebird Tearooms in Malvern has been highlighted by the charity as a good example of a sympathetic café - owner Barry Daws is qualified in sign language, and says that all his staff are trained to be 'deaf-aware'. It has, he says, been a benefit to his business.

The campaign by Hearing Dogs for Deaf People is intended to make caterers aware of their obligations they have concerning assistance dogs.

**This is a Cronut - it is a curious new snack hybrid which has attracted international media attention, and we found this one at Wild and Wood Coffee in London, where it was priced at £4.60 (double the price of the flat white that came with it!)**

A Cronut is a croissant-doughnut pastry invented in New York earlier this year, by a baker who applied to trademark the name just before copies sprang up all over the USA. A general description is a croissant base, a doughnut upper, with a thick chocolate cream on the inside, a chocolate topping, and a glazed outer. At Wild and Wood it was wisely presented with a knife and fork, but there is no way to eat one decorously!



Even Starbucks has now added a similar item, although it calls it a 'duffin', a hybrid donut-muffin. Rather typically, the chain has highlighted 'the artisan nature' of the item, and says that it 'has worked hard to create innovative products'.

Earlier this year at a Canadian trade show, a food vendor's stall was shut down after over 200 people were taken ill and some sent to hospital after eating a 'cronut-burger', a cheeseburger in a croissant bun topped with maple bacon jam. It was later found that the jam was contaminated.

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## Concentrate on the oldies, say surveys

It is clearly time for another collection of market research documents and surveys based on the coffee-house trade – three have appeared in recent weeks.

The Pragma 'marketing solutions' organisation has published work on 'how to stand out from the competition', in which it says it has 'answers and ideas' for cafe operators. Although several of Pragma's figures are rather predictable (customers like wi-fi and loyalty cards) they do say that almost a third of consumers feel that the concept of 'express tills' is likely, and 26 per cent like the idea of discounts for bringing their own re-usable cup.

The coffee itself is not an issue, according to Pragma – only 56 per cent of customers rated it as 'very' or 'extremely' important in choosing a cafe.

United Coffee cites its own survey to say that, while 59 per cent of consumers consider the quality of coffee as 'important or very important' when eating out, an encouraging 64 per cent rated the coffee served in independent and fine dining establishments as excellent or good... but only 22 per cent did so in fast food outlets, and only 10 per cent in pubs. In all sectors, said United, figures ranging from 30 to 40 per cent of those questioned said they would not return to a venue where coffee had been unsatisfactory.

United commented that older consumers were more likely to avoid venues with bad coffee, and elsewhere, Keynote has argued that coffee shops need to 're-appraise the value of the older consumer'.

This again is not exactly new thinking, but according to Keynote, 'those aged under 45 were generally less likely than average to have visited a coffee shop in 2012, while those above 45 were more likely than average to have done so'. In detail, 54 per cent of 35-44 year olds said they had visited a coffee shop, and quite remarkably, 59 per cent of those aged 65 and over had done so. Not surprisingly, Keynote echoes the often-quoted warning that it is going to become more important to look beyond the hipness and coolness of youth, and understand the grey market.

Elsewhere, the Local Data Company observes that in a time when the national high street has more empty shops than ever – one in seven, on average – openings in the specialist food and beverage sector are three times that of any other business type. "Cafes have come to the rescue in our town centres," comment the researchers. "They will absorb some of the 'excess stock' of shops... but not all."



A new kind of soy milk has been introduced to the coffee sector - this is Bonsoy, which says it uses a 'slower cooking and production process, and a traditional recipe perfected by Japanese soy masters over centuries'. The product, which is distributed by Community Foods, has several claims which will be of interest to the coffee trade - it says that the soy beans are completely GM-free (there have been big questions over certain aspects of soya farming) and that Bonsoy is the only soy milk made with fermented soybeans, which produces a distinctive creaminess and vegetable protein. Research among café users in Australia is cited in support of the claim that Bonsoy is easier to work with in espresso-based drinks than other soy milks.

## The cat coffee scandal hits TV

The issue of cruelty in the processing of one of the world's most expensive coffees has arisen again – this time, the question of kopi luwak coffee, or civet-cat coffee, has been raised by the man who says that he was the first to introduce it to the UK, and the BBC has shown a documentary on the subject.

Kopi luwak, or 'cat coffee', is the product in which coffee cherries are eaten by the Indonesian civet, which excretes the bean, which in turn gives a distinctive taste when the bean is roasted for coffee.

Two years ago, as reported on our front page at the time, it was found that farmers had seen the vast profits to be made, and had begun factory-farming the cats and force-feeding them coffee.

The scandal has now been raised again by Tony Wild, once a director of Taylors of Harrogate, who tells us that he was the first person to sell the coffee in the UK. At first, he said, he was proud to have started it – but late last year he read an expose in the Guardian (*a year after our front-page story, we might add!*) which told of the conditions in which the creatures were being farmed, and which in turn inspired the BBC to ask Wild to take part in a documentary involving undercover filming.

A major aspect of the current story is that many coffee companies and retailers are alleged to be continuing to sell the coffee, some claiming that their coffee is produced from 'free-range' civets, which eat the coffee naturally in the wild, and whose excreted beans are collected 'naturally' by human searchers. (Such activity does exist - we have done it ourselves, with monkey-coffee in India).

According to the researchers, this coffee sold as 'free-range' is a fraud – nobody, say the researchers, can guarantee for certain that coffee has been collected from truly wild cats, and even Harrods has been named as a participant.

There is now an online 'Cut the Crap' campaign



How we reported this two years ago

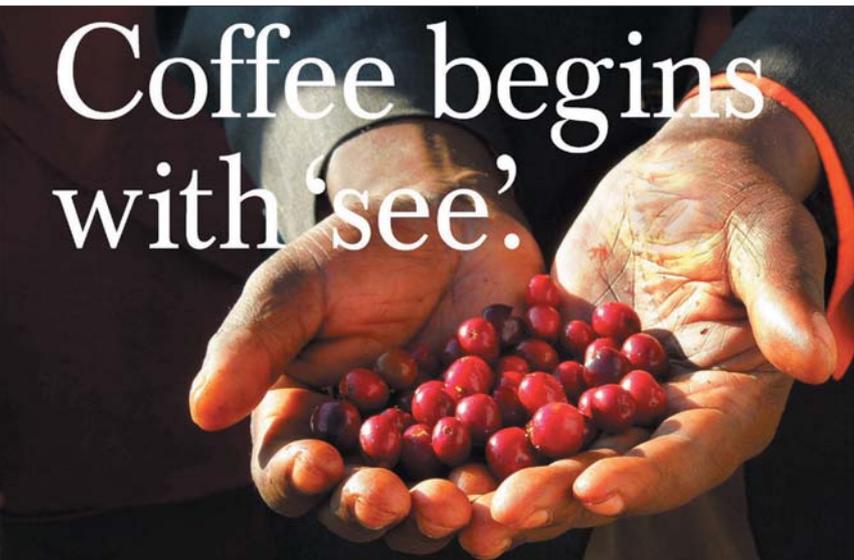
against the system, and a petition which has been signed by nearly fifty thousand users.

Notably, in a document on the matter placed online, there is a list of British trade suppliers alleged to be supplying kopi luwak.

Falcon Coffee, the green bean importer, has reproduced this list on its own website – however, the company's Mike Riley says that in retrospect, he thinks he too may have been responsible for starting the cat-coffee trade, having also appeared on television to talk about it many years ago. He has told us that some trade suppliers have complained about being listed as sources of the coffee.

"On our own website, I have now added a note to say that I genuinely feel that some of these black-listed people sold the coffee in all innocence... the vast majority of businesses mentioned in the Cut the Crap report are reputable and highly respected.

"Most are likely to be appalled that they have been unknowingly supporting a product that involved animal cruelty."



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## Espresso safety – the HSE acts

**The Health and Safety Executive has acted in the matter of the espresso machine explosion incident, and is about to take legal action on the matter.**

Readers will be aware that *Coffee House* magazine has followed very closely, and been peripherally involved in, the HSE's investigation of espresso machine safety, following the explosion in a Sainsbury's store in September 2010.

This magazine has now been advised by the Health and Safety Executive that: "the first hearing of the HSE's prosecution of the machine manufacturers Elektra is on 22 October at Aldershot Magistrates Court where it is highly likely to be adjourned to Crown Court at some point in the future."

The court has confirmed to us that the item is listed for 10am that day.

The HSE has also pointed out to us that two separate investigations have been running with regard to this matter. The HSE explains: "only part of this issue is an HSE investigation – we are investigating the supplier, not the incident. The investigation into the actual incident is being undertaken by the Rushmoor local authority... retail premises are enforced by the local

authority, not the HSE."

Rushmoor has confirmed to us that their investigation is still continuing.

The latest stage in this matter has been welcomed by several players in the machine sector, who continue to report that many caterers simply do not bother with the legal requirements surrounding machine inspection.

The HSE's attitude has also been applauded by the companies who helped in its research, with a view to helping the HSE understand the detail of espresso machines and their working. One told *Coffee House*: "we did help the HSE, and they did do a lot to try and understand. They sent some bright guys, who stayed with us a whole day, and who wanted to relate their existing understanding of boilers to espresso machines."

Meanwhile, in the Ukraine, there has been another cafe-related explosion – in this case, a water boiler exploded in a cafe, killing a member of staff. That incident was captured on CCTV.

**The latest regional tea to crop up is from Cornwall - it is the Smugglers Brew from the Cornish Tea company, which follows the launch of such other brands as Lancashire Tea and Northumberland Tea, who in turn followed the example of the longer-established Yorkshire Tea from Taylors.**

"We launched with a view to doing what Yorkshire Tea has done," founder Duncan Bond told us candidly. "It's more of a branding exercise than a blending one."

"It took us over a year to get started and when we launched a pack of 80s, they went like wildfire - the phone didn't stop ringing, so we followed it up with 40s, a tag-and-envelope, and a catering pack. We've already taken on Jamie Oliver and the River Cottage as clients, and the next step will be Earl Grey and flavoured."

Although the tea is an 'everyday' product, it is different from a classic breakfast tea in that only Kenyan teas are used.

"We use two blenders, because there's only a limited number of people in the UK who can consistently blend tea properly," Duncan told us. "Soon we'll be bringing all our packaging into Cornwall." The brand is reported to be on the lookout for 24 'typical Cornish' faces, to be featured on its new packaging.

Three thousand single-serve bags of American coffee arrived in England this month, to be given away as part of a police project in Hampshire. The police in Portsmouth had devised a community event called 'Policing Through the Ages', which happened to be noticed by a retired American officer, Greg Rynearson, who now runs a café called Cops & Doughnuts in Clare, Michigan, in partnership with nine other former policemen. He sent a couple of bags of his branded coffee to a sergeant in the Portsmouth force, and the result was an invitation to the Americans to visit the community event to run a Cops & Doughnuts 'substation café'. The American press reported that they would be bringing 3,000 bags of coffee to give away in Britain, which we thought a bit heavy - but Greg Rynearson told us that the giveaway would be single-serve bags of 1.75oz each. He is now looking for a contract roaster here to produce the product for the UK.





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MIX

Paper from responsible sources

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Dunkin' Donuts, the massive transatlantic chain, has reportedly signed agreements with two franchise groups to bring the brand back to the UK. The plan is for 150 outlets in five years. The brand did appear in Scotland, and later England, some years ago, through a convenience store operator which later collapsed. With delightful ambition, one franchise operator has referred to the aim of making the brand a 'destination of choice' for the local communities in East London – which is of course the heart of the artisan coffee movement. The brand has over ten thousand cafes across many countries.

The American café company Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf, which has just been acquired by venture capitalists, is also coming - it is reportedly seeking a master franchisee for the UK. The company is fifty years old, and has built up a chain of 900 across the USA.

The JD Wetherspoon pub chain has again taken up the strategy of free coffee refills as part of its 'longer food hours' menu, beginning in October.

The director of the Coffee Kids charity, Carolyn Fairman, has left to take a position with the Specialty Coffee Association of America.

Free espresso was served to late night computer games fans in Tring - the Tiki coffee shop closed its doors as usual at 7pm, but reopened two hours later when it realized that hundreds of fans were queuing to buy the new Grand Theft Auto game at a nearby computer shop.

Costa has created Costa for Schools, an online learning programme designed to support teachers and help students understand more about the communities and economies of coffee growing countries. The target base is 11-14 year old geography students, who will be able to find a series of community case studies through an interactive map. The programme also provides teachers with lesson plans and curriculum guidance which suits secondary geography teaching. The Rainforest Alliance assisted in the project.

Nespresso is to open its first 'coffee boutique' in Scotland, at the Multrees Walk 'luxury shopping area' in Edinburgh. The establishment of Nespresso retail outlets in many top cities has been a major part of Nespresso promotion - in some cities, these sites, which look very similar to upmarket car showrooms, have turned into the chic place to meet on Saturday mornings. In Edinburgh, the site promises that visitors will 'discover how to identify the Grands Crus distinct notes and aromas, assisted by specially trained boutique specialists, while also gaining intricate insight into the origins of gourmet coffee'. The Nespresso boutique will open on 3rd December.

A grandmother from Urmston,

Manchester, whose family were worried that she would become bored in retirement has surprised them by opening an upscale coffee shop. Gina Partington has opened Noesis, and will concentrate on a unique espresso blend and a range of loose-leaf teas. She has said that a coffee shop visit is like tai-chi – it requires thirty minutes for customers to lose themselves in body and mind. The name, Noesis, refers to the part of the brain that experiences like or dislike, pain or pleasure.

A new coffee shop brand, Deluxe Coffee of Islington, is looking to raise £107,000 through a crowd-funding website, Crowdfunder. In its pitch to potential investors, Deluxe says it is 'a stylish new enterprise that aspires to revolutionise what is currently offered on the high street', adding: 'the coffee that is currently offered in the high street coffee shops is average and there is no hot food served... our plan is to open many Deluxe Coffees in the UK, the first of which will be in the capital, London'. At the beginning of October, the pitch had raised £1,300.

An unusual aspect to the new Kenya coffee house in Romford was discovered last month by the local MP Andrew Rosindell, who called in informally to welcome shop owner Joash Robinson Wena to his constituency. He was presented with a giraffe – a craft-made one. It turns out that the café will sell them in support of African villagers, sending all money raised without deduction to Kenya. Quite rightly, on hearing this, the MP paid for his giraffe.

The Joe Black Coffee company of Bootle has told its local press that it expects to double both production capacity and turnover, with its premises having expanded from one industrial unit to three in four years. The company was acquired by Jeremy Janion three years ago, having previously had a long-established roasting history as Bellews. An interesting facet of the company's work is that it is partnering with a local college to provide barista training for the college's 'hotel school'.

Caffe Nero is to open three stores at the Queen's Terminal, opening at Heathrow in June 2014. Apparently the Heathrow authorities demanded that anyone who wanted a contract to operate on the site should come up with a particularly imaginative response – Nero's was to bring in an onsite roastery, a music stage, and a new design featuring wooden workbenches and 'authentic bespoke counters that will display deli-style Italian inspired food'.

Costa is proposing to open a new drive-through coffee house at the Riverside retail park in Taunton. It already has two town-centre sites there. Meanwhile, Costa has also opened its 1000th site, in Bangkok.

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5

The image of the super-automatic coffee machine is about to change again.

The trade has gone through a vast number of arguments and debates about whether or not super-autos can now produce coffee of barista standard, and it has become accepted that, more or less, they can.

We have also gone through many very tedious arguments and claims about how many hundred drink recipes an automatic machine can possibly hold in its memory, and we have seen rather more interesting debates about how certain machines can now produce imaginative chilled drinks as well as hot ones.

The latest move is an intriguing one. It comes from WMF, with the launch of their 8000S, and it brings up the quite fascinating prospect of how a super-automatic machine can now work in conjunction with a skilled barista.

This is new thinking - hitherto, the argument has always been that a caterer would either have a push-button idiot-proof machine, or a skilled human. The new argument says that a super-auto supports the human, by enabling the skilled barista to make detailed changes to any particular drink or recipe, probably far faster than could be done manually. And, at the same time, the machine also allows the unskilled Saturday staff to produce impressive drinks at the touch of one button.

The key to the new machine is partly in the use of a new kind of highly-detailed touchscreen control, and part-

# The super-auto for the thinking beverage manager

The WMF8000s is a machine which is idiot-proof for the part-time staff, yet allows a surprising amount of adjustment for the skilled barista

ly through the use of three separate coffee hoppers. In very simplistic terms, this means that any single drink can, in a matter of a few seconds, be customised by the adjustment of type of coffee, by blend of different coffees from selected hoppers, by volume and temperature of water, and by type of milk foam.

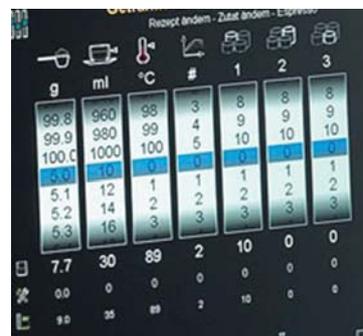
The controls which allow all this to be done are probably familiar to anyone who regularly uses an i-phone, in that the touchscreen allows for the 'drag and drop' of different settings, by the movement of a finger across the screen.

"On many automatic machines, adjustments can be a nightmare," said Matt Keech of Lofbergs, showing some experimentation with the machine launch. "We now have a machine which works on two levels - we have the idiot-proof operation, in which a complete novice can walk up and get a decent coffee, and we have the geeky barista level.

"At this level, we are now able to say: 'yes, I do want this at 82C, I do want 10gm in the shot, I want this volume of water, and I want this temperature and



The WMF8000S and the 'fruit machine' fingertip controls which control grammage, water volume, temperature, and hopper selection



foaming of the milk. It also turns into its own blender, in a simple way - you can now decide that if you want 30 per cent of the coffee in this hopper, and 70 per cent of the next, you can do it."

(It is a machine for experimentation - Coffee House can now claim to have invented, out of sheer mischief, the ristretto macchiato, brewed at 82C with a blend of coffees taken, we confess, completely at random!)

What all this means, says WMF's managing director Florian Lehmann, is that skilled baristas and bar managers have the support of some extremely fast technology: "the difference with this machine is that we are now able to ask: 'exactly what do you want to do with your drinks?'"

A particularly high degree of variation is now open to any caterer who wishes to use it, adds WMF's national sales manager, Steve Brewer.

"If you choose to, you can now open up an entire drinks portfolio. While not wishing to criticise part-time staff, they can now touch a screen and know exactly what they're going to get... beyond that, those who like to experiment will find a lot of niche areas they can open up. Instead of seeing an automatic machine as standard, you now see something which helps you go beyond the norm.

"This may be idiot-proof, but it is not a machine for idiots. It is an automatic machine for people who take coffee seriously enough to experiment."

How many caterers will be willing to experiment?

"Remember what Steve Jobs said about always starting with the customer experience. There are too many machines which only do what they are planned to do, when we all now have to listen to what the market wants.

"So, as an imaginative beverage manager, you don't see this as a machine you just install and leave - you gather your staff round and say 'what kind of things do customers ask

us for? Right, let's play with this and see what it can do!' Managers can now play with the settings to see what they can create - and if they screw everything up, they can go right back to the installation settings, so they don't have to be scared if they experiment and make a pig's ear of it.

"This really is exciting - your team can now be shown that for the one customer in 500 who wants their drink a certain way, they can now do it. They do not have to worry that their push-button machine isn't set up for that one customised requirement."



"You can now use great subtlety in an automatic machine"

- Steve Brewer

It goes much farther than this, he adds. It has recently been pointed out (in these pages!) that the very best automatic machines are now capable of drawing a super result out of some of the world's very best coffees.

It no longer applies that automatic machines are used for 'any old coffee', or that great coffees might be thought to be held back by the limitations of being put through an automatic machine.

"You are now capable of using great subtlety in an automatic machine," remarks Steve Brewer.

However, he adds, nobody has yet made the link between the super-automatic machine and the world's very best coffees and blends - hitherto, the greatest blends from the very best artisan roasters have been destined for the artisan coffee houses.

Now, says WMF, it may be time for the makers of top automatic machines to get together with artisan roasters to find out just what quality they can achieve by working together.

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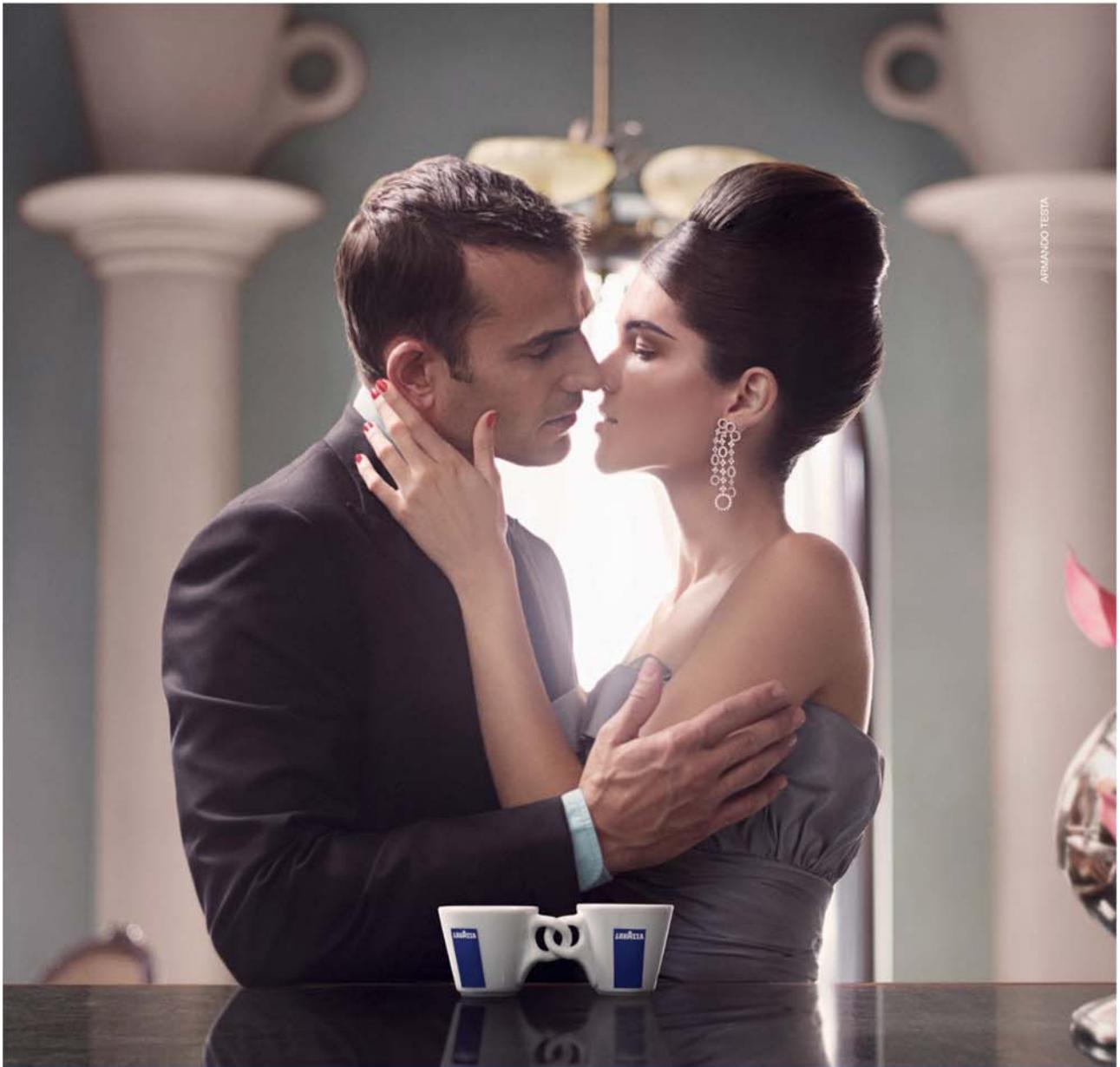
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# LAVAZZA

THE REAL ITALIAN ESPRESSO EXPERIENCE



A quite remarkable anniversary crops up in the British coffee trade this month. It is for Fracino of Birmingham, a brand with a truly unique selling proposition – it is the only British company making commercial espresso machines, and it turns fifty years old during October.

The company was started as a machine distributorship by Frank Maxwell, who introduced 'new' coffee to several far-flung regions – the first espressos in some parts of the west country, north Wales, and Yorkshire came from his work.

However, he was an engineer at heart, and before long he came up with the quite revolutionary plan of building machines in England.

This campaign was enthusiastically assisted by his son Adrian, who had begun tinkering with machines while still a young boy – now, Fracino stamps a Union Jack on its equipment to reinforce its uniqueness, and has become a significant supplier to chains of pubs, cafes and pizza restaurants, and is now a worldwide exporter of espresso machines – including to Italy.

And the youngster who was repairing group heads at the age of ten, Adrian Maxwell, has become the company's managing director.

"Fracino as a company is a few months older than me," he told *Coffee House*. "I was taken into the factory in my carry-cot, and I used to be sat on the counter when my father serviced

# Creating the Italian espresso experience... ... in Birmingham

The UK's only company making traditional espresso machines is fifty years old this month

the espresso machines at cafés. We still know several of the customers from those days, and it's surprising how much we still hear about those days... I had an enquiry today about spares for a 1950s Gaggia!"

The 'image' of Fracino is a difficult thing to pin down. It is certainly not seen as one of the hip and cool brands, but that does not mean that it is behind in technology – no, says Adrian Maxwell, Fracino is a fairly argumentative and opinionated company based on traditional British engineering principles, and it is not shy of giving its opinions on mechanical and technical matters.

"Yes, 'functional' is what we do! We are not worried about being real cool dudes, because the geek machine market is a limited sector. Our big busi-

ness is in coffee shops and pubs and hotels, where the staff do not wear baseball caps the wrong way round, but are real people making coffee in the real world. These are the people we're here for."

Managers who come from an engineering background are always proud of being able to get their hands dirty, and typically, the Maxwell family tends to respect those who roll their sleeves up, while being critical of coffee machine salesmen whose technical knowledge is suspect.

"On my dad's side, we're now into the sixth generation of engineers," says Adrian. "My grandfather was a brilliant machinist, but was terrible at business – Dad is more of an all-round engineer, businessman, and entrepreneur.

"I was re-building coffee groups from the age of ten, but the problem with learning from your dad is that you learn only his way. When he eventually said 'I can't teach you all you need to know', I could have been stuck.

"At the time, it was more difficult to get an apprenticeship than it was to go to university. I only wrote one letter asking for an apprenticeship, because there was only one place I wanted to go to – that letter got me into Rolls Royce, which was fantastic, but wasn't

look at a component and think 'I know how to make that'.

"I had gained a lot of confidence from the way my dad and I would take things apart, figure out how they worked, and put them back again... and in those days, there were some Italian espresso machines that were really bad. We saw steam wands which were so badly fixed in, they could get blown out by the steam pressure! I remember a machine glowing red, even with the power switched off!

"So, it didn't take long for us to start thinking: 'look, we're really being messed around by all these suppliers abroad – why don't we just make the things ourselves?'"

Over recent years, Fracino has taken this principle into unexpected areas – it makes traditional espresso machines, lever machines, dual-fuel machines, bean-to-cup machines, and even ventured into small roasting machines.

This in turn has brought the company in for criticism from other suppliers. Several have questioned how Fracino can possibly dare to make so many different kinds of machine, all of which require different specialisms. Either Adrian Maxwell and his team are engineering geniuses, they say, or they are hopeful jacks of many trades.

## The COFFEE HOUSE interview



easy. When I got there, I thought I already knew things like how to use a lathe, but they hammered home 'there is a right way of doing things'."

They evidently hammered it home well – he won their 'apprentice of the year' title.

"When I joined Dad as a service engineer on the road, I had to put engineering theory into a think-on-your-feet application. Honestly, I never found it hard... I was always stripping cars and bikes down, and when you get to the state where your job is your hobby, you're never going to be bored.

"As an engineer, you see products differently – you come to instinctively understand how things work, and you

Fracino's response is delightfully blunt – it respects engineers who understand machines, and derides salesmen who do not.

"A big problem is the way espresso machines are sold by people who don't understand the engineering of them. I see things sold by box-shifters which are positively dangerous! I get calls from cafe operators asking for help on machines they've been sold by other companies, and I wonder what their salesmen think they are doing."

By contrast, Britain's really good engineers deserve more recognition, remarks Maxwell.

"There are some excellent espresso engineers in the UK, that's agreed. If

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there is a problem, it is that some of them who are great engineers don't sell themselves well enough.

"In the old days, our competitors always wondered why they couldn't get past Frank Maxwell, because his customers stayed loyal to him. They said: 'who's this bloody Maxwell we can't sell against?' It was because Dad made a reputation as the guy the customers knew would be out in the evening if they needed him... he knew how to sell himself as well as his services."

Are espresso engineers an under-respected species?

"Oh, yes. We did think that for our 50th, it would be good to have a group of independent engineers together for a conference, for a weekend," remarks Adrian. "It would be a wonderful thing

to cheat technology. You cannot do what some of these people claim!

"Too many machine suppliers rush to follow 'new' technology and don't test it thoroughly. So, when we get people saying 'this is the latest trend, can you do it?', what we like to reply is: 'we can do it better, and simpler'."

Fracino are great fans of the dual-fuel concept, for use in mobile catering. Their dual-fuel lever machines now carry the claim of 'the most powerful in the world', and came about through a long-standing Fracino habit of co-operating with other engineering companies in Birmingham to share from each others' specialist expertise.

"There are other dual-fuel lever machines around, but we have extended the idea most.

“It didn't take long for us to start thinking: 'look, we're really being messed around by all these suppliers abroad – why don't we just make the things ourselves?'”

- Adrian Maxwell

to do, but of course they keep getting call-outs, so getting engineers together in one place is always a problem!"

To what degree has Fracino kept up with fashionable machine trends? Noticeably, the range now includes a PID machine (that's about the rather complex equations which retain stability in temperature and pressure control, the big buzzwords of recent years). It is not, remarks Maxwell, as dramatic an innovation as might be thought.

"To be honest, these things go in a circle – too many machine suppliers are now struggling to find 'new' features to sell, and we've seen 'new' ideas which we tried in the 60s and 70s!

"We have been playing around with temperature stability for twenty-five years, but because machines then were not made to the standard they are today, some were a disaster.

"Today, some temperature claims are just silly. They are utter rubbish. PID is a mathematical formula, which is being used by some salesmen who are trying

dual-fuels, and it's our best-selling export machine."

Some of Fracino's experiments have not had such success. The T-Bird was a tea brewer which drew a lot of attention and then just disappeared.

"This was very sad. We had designed and made it in conjunction with Unilever, to sell Lipton tea. But they went about it the wrong way round – they could have put 50 machines out into the market like a shot and built their tea business on the back of it, but they never got it together, and we got nowhere. Eventually they scrapped 250 machines.

"I asked if I could buy their share of the property rights, and they refused... but in a few years the patent will be dead, and I'll do what I like with it!"

A product which has experienced an unexpected revival is the Roastilino, a coffee roaster which uses a 'bed' of hot air in a glass chamber. It is a sample roaster, capable of around 250gm of coffee, and we on this magazine most recently saw one in the training room of Paddy & Scotts in Suffolk, where they use it to show trainees the changes that roasting coffee goes through.

"This began thirteen years ago, and I think we were too advanced for the time," reflects Adrian Maxwell. "The technology came from something developed to dry paint, which had been devised by the best female engineer I've ever come across.

"Four or five years ago, I said it was dead, and I was going to scrap it. Our sales director at the time said no, he would prove it could be sold... so we made it a bit more sophisticated, and now we make and sell a batch every month. We even have a geek using them in a couple of coffee shops in Holland.

"After 13 years, it's finally beginning to sell well, probably because the trend for micro-roasting has fired everyone's enthusiasm."

Today, Fracino turns out espresso machines at a rate which is greater than some of the big Italian brands, and has some very desirable contracts with notable players across the coffee, pub and hotel sectors.

This, says Adrian Maxwell, is the business Fracino wants. He may not be seen as the most chic name in the trendiest coffee markets, and doesn't want to be – he would prefer to be seen as a solid engineering company which produces everyday reliability.

"We are who we are – we're engineers and we do a good job.

"We don't say nasty things about competitors who are more trendy than we are, but I do hope we're a thorn in their sides!

"And if we are, I don't expect them to say nasty things about us... I expect them to have the courage to try and fight us fairly, as engineers!"

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A curiosity of the café trade is the way that every supplier argues against the dominance of Cadbury in hot chocolate... without actually doing anything to fight the giant.

Their argument is that consumers want a 'better' chocolate... but of course, Cadbury hammers its brand message constantly, in a way that the competing brands can not match. And to the frustration of these suppliers, few café owners rarely seem to be active in promoting an alternative chocolate.

"This is a thought I have been dwelling on recently," remarks Philip Rundlett at Regency Coffee. "It's about the little focus that is put upon the power of brand. I've been banging on to our customers and prospects about the power of the brand and brand identity and the significance that a brand can have on the coffee shop... however, it appears this falls upon deaf ears.

"Coffee companies have built respect and loyalty to their brands because the consumer has come to expect the quality of the brand. Chocolate seems not to get the same respect - I can only assume there isn't the same passion for serving a quality chocolate brand that there is in coffee.

"Why doesn't the coffee shop owner stand up and proudly announce 'I sell Ghirardelli' or indeed any other chocolate? Why does chocolate get pushed under the counter?"

It's not as if there are no stories to tell, he says. The ancient gods and their people drank it and Ghirardelli has its own strange stories of origin - it rose to fame during the Californian gold rush, becoming a luxury for exhausted farmers.

"We should be proud of our brands and our stories, and tell our customers what we sell," argues Rundlett. "Stop hiding the tin - if it's as good as your coffee, then start making a big thing about it."

One which has been attempting to make some noise recently is Marimba, which is the latest supplier to advocate the use of chocolate flakes - this format, it is argued, is the most convenient way of making 'real' chocolate drinks in the café environment.

A feature of the Marimba promotion is the phrase 'lovingly made in our own kitchens' and this, says operations manager Brad Wright, is true:

"Yes, we do a lot of the processes in Sudbury. Conching chocolate is a very complex process, and probably the only company really set up to take beans and turn them into chocolate is Cadbury. We get it in the most basic form we can, and we turn it into enormous blocks, and then we shred it into flakes and package it ourselves.

"We do as much of the work as we can - it gives us an enormous amount of quality control, and we can also call ourselves proper 'chocolatiers'."

Equally unusually, Marimba is a supplier which has its own retail and café operation - it has first-hand experience

## Chocolate - the power of brand, the ease of flake, and the continuing value of powder



*Powder is still a very valuable format, says Beyond the Bean - but take the time to understand the different formats and how to use them, and then explain chocolate well to the customer*

of how its chocolate goes down with consumers.

"Chocolate has definitely come a long way. You can see how the consumers got into single-origin coffees, and you can see how hot chocolate is now getting to that point. People really are looking for a better out-of-home product than they can make at home... they know there's a better chocolate than powder, and they're looking for it.

"There really is an interested customer base out there. Look at the supermarkets - there are now single-origin chocolates on their shelves, and this shows how big the business is becoming, because they don't do anything unless they see a demand. Chocolate is not an 'end of the menu'



*Check out the use of flake, says Marimba*

item any more."

Why supply chocolate in flake form?

"It's true that you can get great chocolate in powder form, but for those who want to serve something which is clearly different and of high quality, there is very little as easy to handle as a great chocolate in flake form.

"The reason we decided to go to flakes is because of time. While some caterers say 'just melt down the bar?', it's not easy - we were physically melting our chocolate down to serve it, and it was too time-consuming. One portion of our flake is just the same as a 40gm bar, you do not need excessively hot milk, and the force of the steam wand does the work for you. The result is ease of use and speed in making the drink.

"We launched the product eighteen months ago, having experimented in

our own café long before that. We have only taken trade sales seriously for a year, but we are already in two hundred outlets, with many more that we haven't yet spoken to, which shows the level of interest."

Consumers are showing a greater interest in the differentiation of chocolate tastes, he says.

"Our Dominican White has a very 'smoky' note to it - it goes to the top of the nose! This is rather more sophisticated than the sweetness you often find with the usual white chocolates. It's a grown-up Milky Bar. The Ecuador is punchy and earthy, and the Venezuela is sweeter and fruity.

"Whites are trendy - you begin to see a lot of white mochas around. Most cafes go for the slightly sweeter Venezuelan, although a mocha does tend to take some of the sweetness out of the chocolate.

"With this interest in real chocolate, I am horrified to be told that some cafes still make their mochas or hot chocolates with a syrup!"

How might a café operator test chocolate for their own possible use?

"We treat chocolate in a similar way to wine or coffee for testing and tasting. The ultimate decision is in the first mouthful - if that first thought is 'wow, smashing!', then you must think seriously about that chocolate. For sampling, we find it best to brew a hot chocolate as if we were to serve in a 12oz mug, but serve in a shot cup... a 'shorter' hot chocolate."

And, he suggests, try tasting the cold option, too.

"Iced chocolate is very easy with flakes. Instead of steaming the milk in the jug, put the chocolate flakes into a blender with a tiny dash of hot water to help it melt, then 8oz of cold milk, and either serve over ice or crush the ice with it. We found this very popular in the summer."

Do not underestimate the value of chocolate in powder form, says Joanne Fairweather at Beyond the Bean. She offers chocolate as flake (one of the first suppliers in the UK to offer it this way), powder, syrup and sauce, and

advises that each has its advantages.

"We have a Belgian flake which goes well. This gives something different, and is for the kind of operator who works with single-origin coffees.

"Powder is still a very easy format to use, and it does have advantages - there's a big range, it's easy to store (we have known operators melt flakes and tablets by storing them in the wrong place!) and with a powder you get a very nice texture that you won't get with a solid disc. With flakes, we often suggest that you heat your milk half-and-half with single cream, which is not too much of a chore, and will add a nice 'body' to the chocolate. With a good powder, you'll get a nice thick texture to start off with."

In agreement with Regency, Beyond the Bean advocates taking more trouble over the description of chocolate on menus and specials boards.



*Sir Hans Sloane's chocolate beads*

"Building a chocolate trade takes patience. Yes, we are seeing more people going to darker chocolate, and we do see tastes changing. But the British palate is for something hot and sweet, and although they're now looking for something more intense, they're not all going to make the jump to great chocolate in one go.

"So, have both a standard and a deluxe chocolate on your menu, and be prepared to take your time to explain the differences... be prepared to build your chocolate trade, and don't expect it to happen at once."

An interesting new drinking chocolate is about to appear from the Hans Sloane brand. This name has a distinguished history - not least because the original man lived in Jamaica, disliked the local cocoa and water drink, and created his own. He developed the first milk and cocoa mix, and effectively invented milk chocolate, which he sold to the Cadbury Brothers.

The brand's latest drinking chocolate is in a format which is neither powder nor solid - it is unique chocolate beads, which have an attractive shiny sheen. The brand has devised three high-cocoa single-origin drinking chocolates (Grenada, Madagascar and Ecuador) and has now produced a unique one which will attract attention on a menu - it is a blend of natural honey with its original rich dark and smooth milk drinking chocolates.



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SWISS COFFEE TECHNOLOGY

There has been a host of famous sporting names linked with coffee-house openings recently... we've seen one Olympic athlete and two professional footballers, and last month, a variation on the coffee house theme was launched in Winchester by two more sportsmen. This is Black White Red, owned by the England and Harlequins rugby skipper Chris Robshaw and his old school friend, Hampshire cricketer Kevin Latouf.

The pair are concentrating on the age-old theme of linking coffee and wine – but in this case, they have gone beyond the usual old trade cliché of 'coffee is like wine...'. The significant point about this new café is that the two drinks are treated as equals, each is given equal respect, largely through the experience of Kevin Latouf, who has had a second career as a writer on wine for the quality papers.

The new project is more than just another coffee bar, he told us.

"What we are doing is linking the two things, seriously. We are not a wine shop that does a bit of coffee on the side, and we're not a coffee shop with a couple of bottles on the shelf.

"There has always been a definite link between wine and coffee, and it's not just that those who enjoy good coffee enjoy fine wine.

"I don't have much time for writing on wine any more, but I do remember the surprise when I realised: 'gosh, there is better coffee!', and I realised how a coffee-tasting is very similar to a wine tasting.

"We have found wines which have similar taste profiles to coffees – a Yirgacheffe is very similar in character to a French pinot noir that we have. So the idea is: 'if you like this, you might like this...'. If you like this character in your wine, you'll like it in your coffee.

"We thought very hard about this... we have a wine wall, and next to the wines we show the coffees which will make a match. We do a 'weekend match', which started off with a Yirgacheffe and a burgundy. We do want to find good ideas and share them with our customers... but on the other hand we have also found some horrible mis-matches!

Are customers really expected to drink wine and coffee at the same meal?

"Yes - we have found that customers who drink wine all evening will finish off with an 'after-wine' coffee. The attitude we're getting from customers is 'why not', and they're giving it a go."

(Kevin was intrigued when we told

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# If you liked that, you'll like this...



The sportsmen get ready to open - Chris Robshaw (left) and Kevin Latouf

him about the project that Union Hand Roasted did a few years ago, when they paired coffees with single malt whiskies – "yes," he responded thoughtfully, "I can see the point of that...".

There is, we suggested to the cricketer, a distinct danger of some elitism in this approach - is his new business for coffee snobs and wine snobs? One of the oldest cliches in coffee is the phrase 'coffee is like wine...', and the people who start talking like that often go on to be extremely pompous about it... but in reality, some people like to 'appreciate' each drink, and other people like to 'glug' them. Is Kevin able to cater for both of these kinds of customer?

"We are. My whole ethos on wine is that there are too many barriers. It's so intimidating that 95 per cent of people look at a wine display and think: 'where do I start?' So they just grab something and get out.

"That 95 per cent don't care about vintage or soil type. Well, we'll give out that kind of information if the customer really wants it, but we're more interested in saying: 'this is what it tastes like, and this is what it goes with'.

"We set our wines up in threes. The one in the middle is something you've heard of, the ones beside it are wines you may never have heard of, but they are similar... so next time, why not try this?

"And it's the same with coffee! My big worry is that too many coffee places go too far and do to coffee what happened to wine... the whole thing got too complicated. It really doesn't matter if you're spending £10 a bottle or £100 - the whole thing is subjective, and our job is to be a helpful guide, without lecturing."

Of the two sportsmen, Kevin has the greater experience in coffee, having previously opened another café, Josie's. The rugby skipper is, he says, learning fast, to the degree that the new venue even uses the highly-unusual tactic of serving cold-drip coffee (this is the system in which the brewing is done slowly over many hours).



Wine for Latouf, the Captain's Blend for Robshaw

"I learned on the job at Josie's. Now, I cringe to think what my first flat whites must have been like. Here, we are using a La Marzocco Linea for our espresso, or an Aeropress and V60 for filter.

"But we are also doing cold-drip coffee, and what immediately struck us was how we're getting different flavours from all these methods, and we keep asking - why does this happen? And we now find that one coffee, as an Aeropress, fits with a wine in a different way from when brewed as a cold drip.

"Yes, cold drip is operationally practical. We're getting used to it - it takes time, and we've worked on six-hour brew times to 18-hour brews. The great thing is, after it's brewed, it lasts for a few days!

"We decant it into bottles, and we serve a decent-sized wine glass."

The coffee comes from The Roasting Party.

"I found them through a guy who serviced my coffee machine at Josie's. They're very new roasters here, based just outside Winchester, but they have another roastery in Sydney. They've begun turning up as guest coffees in London already.

"It's not just about going to a local micro-roaster because they're local - we find we can work more closely with them than we can with bigger roasters, and we can return the process, showing them things about wine."

The sportsmen have already worked with the local roaster to devise their house espresso blend, named The Captain as a light-hearted reference to Robshaw.

"It's Sumatran, with a Colombian, and a Kenyan peaberry. I'm not a fan of a light roast - I want something more to it, and this can punch through the milk."

The new café began attracting attention before it opened, in two ways.

"First, the site we took over had been boarded up for years, so we made a point of taking the boards away, so that people could see what we were doing, and that created a buzz before we opened. We've had interest from day one, and as soon as we opened, people were popping in and saying 'we've been watching you!'

"This is good. We only see things from our side of the counter, and just when you think you've thought of everything, a customer says 'but what about...?'

And of course the partners' fame helped.

"Yes... I never realised that Winchester is such a big rugby town until I walked down the street with Chris, and everybody collared him!

"He's not an expert on wine or coffee, but he does want to know 'why do I like this?', which is the same principle behind all our matching and pairing. He loves getting behind the coffee machine in the shop - he's really excited about it.

"I imagine everyone in the Quins and England teams are now getting a bit of an ear-bashing from him about his Captains Blend...!"

One of the most entertainingly opinionated coffee operators in London has just opened his fifth bar, and suggests that he has finally achieved the right balance of a typical Italian bar... and very oddly, has introduced a coffee machine which, rather unexpectedly, also turns out to be typical of modern-day Italian coffee habits.

The operator is Luciano Franchi of Caffé Vergnano 1882, who opened his first café in Charing Cross Road in 2002, and has just opened up in New Street Square, which is in the heart of the legal 'inns of court' area around Chancery Lane. It is a classic well-heeled wine bar area, which gives a clue to the style he has been seeking: 'the Italian way of drinking'.

"Originally, when we began in London, we wanted to promote coffee the Italian way, and our hidden agenda was to produce 'an authentic Italian bar'. We couldn't do that in the first shop because of licensing problems - we almost did it in Southwark, but that turned into more of a restaurant. The new one is the ideal concept, and as it is in a 'wine bar district', near Lincoln's Inn and all the legal houses, it's the kind of customer base we like."

The opportunity came by invitation.

"We had a call from the developers, who had conducted a survey around the offices here, on 'what coffee shop would you like?' The survey offered Starbucks, Costa, Caffé Nero, or 'other'... and 95 per cent came back with a tick beside 'other'!

"This is not a restaurant, it's not a coffee shop, but a bar, and the proof is in the way it works well, all day. We now have big commercial companies in the square who don't hold their morning meetings in their offices any more - they come here instead. In the evening, it works as a wine bar.

"This is a concept I haven't seen in London before. There are wine bars with a token coffee offering, but I think we are the first to make it work in that the Italian way of drinking applies here - you have a wine, I'll have a coffee, and we're both happy."

It is Franchi who has been responsible for some severe comments on the British coffee trade over the years - several years ago he published a 'coffee guide' which said that, among many inflammatory remarks, that despite the growth of coffee shops, 'the state of the UK coffee market today is an absolute catastrophe... a whole generation of Britons has been deceived by the large American coffee roasters into buying and consuming a product that would be laughed at if served in its natural home of Italy'.

He has not changed.

"Opinionated? You don't know the half of it!" he laughs. "We don't follow fads or gimmicks. We refuse to even entertain the concept of the flat white - certainly no 20oz takeaways for us!

"I do believe that the modern coffee bars are doing a good job, and the best

## Vergnano - traditionalists discover the capsule!



Luciano Franchi with Caffé Vergnano's 'minimalist' capsule machine

thing of all is that they are not chains... the people in these new bars have a vested interest in the business, and they really do want to produce the best they can.

"They are certainly doing a better job than the industry was doing before."

With five shops in London, is Caffé Vergnano not now turning into a chain? The business is an independent partner of the Italian Caffé Vergnano business, which now has cafes in many parts of the world.

"The large brands have made the word 'chain' a bad name," returns Luciano Franchi readily. "Our commitment to quality protects us, because we do not have anyone over us pressuring us into opening twenty shops. The Vergnano family aren't doing this because they need the money - they're doing it because they love it.

"I first came to be associated with them after working with a coffee importer who wanted help... after ten months, I had managed to reduce his already-small customer base, but by then he had taught me all he knew about coffee.

"Then I met the Vergnano family at a show, and they wanted to work with someone who was not a general importer, but who would concentrate entirely on developing their brand... and now, they're more than happy with what we've done over the years."

The newest Vergnano move is a surprising one. The brand has moved into coffee capsules, and has even devised its own machine.

This, says Luciano Franchi, also copies a trend in Italy where, perhaps surprisingly, Nespresso has taken off as the fashionable at-home coffee format.

"Why did Nespresso become fashionable in Italy? Because the machine was trendy, which Italians like... but they did not like the coffee. This is why Lavazza also moved into the capsule coffee market, with some success.

the other way round.

"The whole idea was to give Nespresso users a better coffee option - the Vergnano capsules are quite a bit cheaper than Nespresso, but they have not been sold on price.

"They have been sold as an alternative, and in Italy, it has been so successful that Vergnano quadrupled their turnover through capsules!"

There is now a specific Vergnano capsule machine, which is constructed to be functional, and not so 'designer-looking' as the Nespresso.

"This is a minimalist machine," confirms Franchi. "You can use it in a place with a five-inch gap - the capsules go in a little slot at the top, the spent capsules come out the front, and you can fill the tank from the top.

"We are now talking to hotels about this as an in-room machine. It's an interesting market - I was never happy with espresso pods, but espresso capsules turn out to be a good product."

Rather to his surprise, the product has made a fast start in the UK.

"Vergnano has now sold over 40,000 of these machines in Italy, and I've sold 200 here, without any advertising, and we have not had one complaint about reliability or quality.

"In our shops, we are now selling four times as many capsules as our ground coffee or beans, and we sell a lot of that... this has shocked me. I didn't expect it."

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We have always been intrigued by the way that certain production sites have used the tactic of opening up the front of their premises to the general public – in Italy, the La Spaziale machine company turned their foyer into the city's coolest coffee bar, and more recently, La Cimbali's site hosts a coffee machine museum. In Dublin, Java Republic turned the front of their roastery into a public café, and in Lancaster, Atkinsons did very much the same.

One of the most unusual such public venues is tucked away in the railway arches under a station in north-east London – it is the outdoor barbecue area which sits at the entrance to the Climpson and Sons roastery.

It is in recent years that Climpsons has become one of the fashionable coffee brands, but Ian Burgess has been in coffee for a long time before that, formerly as Burgil Coffee. The adoption of his new identity was unintentional.

"I had got a pitch at the market here at London Fields, and then a shop site came up. The sign on it said Climpson and Son, which had been a butchers... London Fields itself had been a holding pen for animals before they were taken down the canal.

"I thought it was a nice shop, and nice signage, so I left it in place and thought nothing more of it... but then everybody coming in starting referring to us as Climpsons!"

Quite unusually, Ian Burgess was one of the very first of the East London breed of coffee traders.

"We were already here when the whole east London scene began to take off... we're not among the newcomers. At the beginning, the coffee business in this area was so difficult that I relied on every Saturday, when I knew that one day's business would make me the rent.

"This railway arch was just a shell when we found it. We had already been roasting on a three-kilo Whitmee gas roaster in Norwich, which had its diffi-

# Underneath the arches...



You can get a pig's head into one of these...  
Ian Burgess at his roastery barbecue

culties – once the light went out, and we thought we simply had to re-light it. We caused a massive explosion, and I lost my eyebrows and eyelashes!

"Then, when wholesale enquiries came in, we brought in a 15-kilo roaster."

Does the experience of having run a coffee shop help in the management of a trade supply business?

It does, responds Ian Burgess forcefully.

"I'm a big believer in the experience of coffee shops and roasters going together. I always say to my new potential trade customers, 'have you worked in a coffee shop before?'"

"It's surprising how many have not. I say to them: 'go and do it before you open up your own!'"

Having established the roastery, Ian Burgess looked to see what else he could do under the railway

arches. One idea was a craft beer brewery – "the beer was a success, but the business was six months of heartache and pain, so I stepped away from it."

That led indirectly to the establishment of a full-sized bar at the front of the roasting room, and then the construction of a quite delightful, and deceptively ancient-looking, barbecue outside the main door. There is also, hidden in the unlikely interior of a shipping container, a full chef's kitchen.

"I have always loved barbecues, and I have always been fascinated by the process of taking something raw and making something of it. So, we built a brick barbecue outside the arch, and on a busy day, we can now have 200 people out there. We're not just a coffee roaster – we're a local company with a vibe!"

"Our best event this year was one with an Australian beer, Stone and Wood, from Byron Bay. They had plans to come here, I said I wanted to be the first in England to sell their beer, and we ended up putting on the first Byron Bay blues festival at the roastery.

"We also use the outside kitchen as a platform for young chefs. Every young chef wants their own restaurant, and here we have a facility where they can do anything they want, with every tool they need. They can do anything from fine dining to barbecues here... we can get a pig's head into those ovens!"

"We've even had Raymond Blanc filming here."

Added activity like this, says Ian Burgess, keeps a company fresh.

"Spend £10,000 on building a barbecue? Not many coffee roasters would do that!"

"But all this activity recreates us every year... customers get bored with suppliers and venues, but companies who are willing to continually reinvent themselves will find that they always come up with good new ideas.

"Are we having fun? Yes – why have your own business if you can't have fun with it?"





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A very curious new bar opened last month in Fleet Street, London – a takeaway Italian food bar in which coffee plays a major part.

The guy behind it is someone who has appeared in these pages before, but that was back in the days when he was not well known, before he became one of the most frequently-seen TV chefs, and indeed before he won the 'king of the jungle' title on *I'm A Celebrity*.

It is Gino D'Acampo, and his new business is My Pasta Bar, in which the design and atmosphere does carry a distinct tang of Italy to it.

Gino does know his pasta – before he moved into celebrity-cheffing, he was a development chef for an Italian pasta brand, and has long imported the stuff under another of his companies.

Pasta, he told us, is a great partner to coffee for the take-out lunch market. What surprises him is that nobody in the coffee bar sector has yet exploited its potential.

"The reason behind the new bar," he told us, "was that I realised that if you are in London and want a decent plate of pasta on the go... there's nowhere!"

"And everyone loves pasta. It doesn't cost a fortune, and it's a two-minute dish."

The problem, he acknowledges, is that it is often mistreated.

"It's true that the British have been used to a kind of pasta which we don't recognise in Italy – the carbonara here is entirely different from what we would expect there. Some pasta dishes have been adapted for the English, and some have been bastardised, and some are very often overcooked... I have always said that when a dish is simple, it can also be very simple to get it wrong, and that applies to pasta.

"But, as more people have more experience of travel, more people know the differences and enjoy a good pasta. This was the gap I saw, and this is why I have spent the last couple of years training chefs on pasta!"

There are some curiosities to serving pasta for takeaway use – one is the packaging. Heat and sauce may not always be a convenient takeaway mix.

"We had to have new packs created specially for us. The wrong packaging, with the heat and steam of pasta, can make pasta taste awful. Our packaging doesn't spoil the pasta."

The profitable partner, he stresses, is coffee.

"The ideal coffee with pasta is always espresso, and there is a reason for that. Pasta is about carbohydrates - it's a very filling dish, and it has to be digested. Espresso is good for the digestion because the stomach needs good blood circulation for digestion, and espresso is good for the circulation.

"I use an espresso which is 60 per cent Arabica and 40 per cent robusta – yes, that's a high robusta content, but that kick is the Italian bit! If you go fur-

## King of the jungle turns to pasta in Fleet Street



'Fantastico!' - Gino D'Acampo samples his own takeaway pasta

ther north in Italy, you will find a 90 per cent Arabica; if you go south you'll find more robusta. For the Neapolitan experience, where I come from, it will be around 60:40.

"It's mainly Colombian, and I have it roasted in the UK so that I can keep an eye on it. The roaster is Neapolitan, he's a friend, and he's flexible... the big brands just want to sell you what they do, not what you want."

It has been said before by baristas that creating their house blend is extremely difficult – typically, another Italian barista once told us he thought blending would be easy for someone who knew about coffee, and was astonished to spend months over it.

As a chef, remarks Gino, he found it came 'slightly' easier to him, but nevertheless, he agrees, blending coffee "is not easy... it's harder than you think."

The result is now retailed over the counter in one-kilo packs, or in ground form in 250gm bags. It uses the My Pasta Bar branding, rather than Gino's name.

The bar's espresso machine is a La Cimbali semi-automatic – the staff do the milk.

"I saw loads of machines, and this was the most suitable. I want the set-up and the grind the way I want it, and the reason is that I want thirty or forty of these places, and I want to know it tastes the same... you don't know if the barista in Newcastle is doing the same as the one in Gloucester."

(And there will, he tells us, be branches in both places – he has also looked at Manchester, the Lake District, and even Westfield).

According to La Cimbali, his strategy is working.

"Coffee with consistency is something that more multi-site businesses are striving to do," says the brand's Matt Tuffee. "Where there is another major product involved, such as Gino's pasta, and where the key is speed, the

coffee cannot be seen to hold up the whole operation.

"Gino has the M53 DolceVita with turbo-steam, which allows the operator to multi-task. The turbo wand could be doing milk for a latte, while they're using the other wand for cappuccino milk, and the machine is getting on with the espressos.

"For a bar of this profile, they had to go from zero to perfect on day one... I've been in there a few times now, and they've done it. And at a very good price point, too."

The pasta bar coffee menu is quite

straightforward, except for one item. On teasing Gino that no flat white appears, he introduced us instead to the Nutellatte.

"I invented it! Nutella is the chocolate spread, and I make a cream with it which has a fantastic hazelnut flavour. This is a very Italian taste – coffee with hazelnut was created in Naples years ago, and I have been to the bar Caffe Del Professore, which was the first."

(The proprietor of that café also makes chocolate and coffee drinks which Gino has described as 'hot hazelnut ice-cream' and 'coffee hazelnut cheesecake').

The London Nutellatte turns out to be a very mild, creamy drink. The hazelnut taste is not as dry or as sharp as it can be from a syrup.

We couldn't resist one further slightly mischievous query. Competing to become 'king of the jungle', Gino D'Acampo caused a worldwide scandal by daring to catch, kill and cook a rat for his camp colleagues to eat – the animal-rights lobby was incensed, there was talk of prosecution, and the TV company was eventually fined.

What coffee and pasta would go well with rat, we enquired?

The response was immediate.

"I can tell you... believe me, nothing at all goes well with rat!"

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## Times still uncertain for high street cafes

Having recently reported the surprise closure of the Cafelicious operation of Swindon, which had been fairly well-regarded and had even won a prize for its hot chocolate, we can now report that owner Barry Cook has almost immediately popped up again, this time as Cotswold Artisan Coffee in Cirencester, just a few miles away.

Here, he has been greeted with the usual spate of complaints about 'yet another coffee shop' in a town which already has a dozen, with the local press reporting 'an angry outburst on Twitter', with demands that the building be put to better use as a clothes shop or delicatessen. By contrast, the chamber of commerce said it was happy to see empty premises being filled.

His experience just shows how the changing pattern of high streets is having an effect on cafe survival, he told us.

"Making proper money out of this trade is extremely difficult," he acknowledged. "The problem in Swindon was not of competition – it was the demographic changing due to the type of shops opening, typically bookmakers and pawnbrokers, funnily enough opposite each other!

"This in turn pushed away the type of customers we needed - when there is very little choice of other types of shops, then the public will choose to shop elsewhere.

"We could have gone down-market to adjust to the changing area, but decided to start a new, much more coffee-focused coffee shop (as stupid as that sounds) in Cirencester.

"We shall do our best to make sure the public can differentiate between us and the others – if we can show that we really are different, then we hope the public will choose to return... although after the local paper's recent stories, 'not just another coffee shop' may become a future strapline for our marketing!"

Elsewhere, the local press in Midhurst has reported in some detail the surprise closure of Ye Olde Tea Shoppe, which has operated since 1999. The partners blamed rising business rates and the failure of local authorities to support business in the town, in such matters as parking, and allowing street markets to block access to shops. They were reported as having lost £20,000 in a year, and regularly failing to take the £450 per day which was their break-even figure.

In one of those cross-cultural examples which sounds bizarre over here but probably makes sense over there, Nescafe in Mexico has become a major sponsor of – wait for it – the Day of the Dead. Furthermore, the brand is involved in what sounds like the extremely tasteful project of an attempt to establish the Guinness World Record for the largest Day of the Dead altar in the United States. This (we quote direct from Nescafe) "will literally take the celebrations to the next level". Illustrating this, the massive altar will illustrate La Catrina (the skull-like icon of the event) drinking Nescafe in the afterlife. Nescafe has two products which it promotes at this time, one a Mexican hot chocolate with a hint of cinnamon, and one an instant coffee blended with cinnamon and sugar.



# Kaldi

A cannabis grower in Durham has unsuccessfully attempted to use coffee roasting as a way of hiding the smell of the plants he was illegally growing. Durham crown court was told that police found coffee beans roasting on a hotplate, behind which they discovered 40 cannabis plants. Referring to a well-known marketing technique, the police said: 'we thought he wasn't using the coffee smell to sell his house...'

With what appears to be quite unconscious timing, the SSP catering chain has partnered with Starbucks to re-open the former Pumpkin café sites at Woking and Stockport railway stations this month. The pre-Hallowe'en period is, of course, annual promotional time for the Starbucks pumpkin latte!

Starbucks has come under even more criticism in America for allegedly failing to face up directly to the fraught issue of gun-carrying customers. The latest criticism stems from the fact that the chain has not invoked its right, which it can do under American law, to opt out of national and local gun laws and say that guns may not be carried inside its cafes. Instead, as an American columnist has now commented, the chain has attempted not to alienate its gun-carrying customers, and has simply succeeded in being seen as indecisive. "Its passive policy didn't attract much notice until gun-rights zealots began staging headline-catching 'appreciation days' at Starbucks," wrote the columnist. "The chain's chief executive only said that a number of these recent episodes involving 'open carry' of guns were 'unsettling and upsetting for many of our customers'. Starbucks has simply moved from 'guns are OK', to 'guns aren't OK, but aren't banned, either'." Another critic in America has written sarcastically, using Starbucks-like phrasing, that he now expects a recommendation from the pro-gun lobby that for 'enhanced community safety', the only solution is for Starbucks to arm its baristas as well...

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