

Boughton's COFFEE HOUSE



Scoop Malone, the beverage trade's finest reporter, brings you another magazine full of trade news and issues!

December 2013

Malicious online reviews - can victims now take legal action?

The problem of malicious fake 'reviews' on specialist websites has come under question again, but with new developments in the tracking of them, and possible response – a café owner has said that he is now considering legal action after receiving 30 malicious reviews on the TripAdvisor site, all of which are thought to have been made by the same person. TripAdvisor itself has confirmed that the practice of posting fake 'reviews' is illegal.

The café in question began receiving the poor reviews after having achieved press coverage for winning a trade award. Late in November, it suffered seven adverse reviews in one day, five on a second day, and four on a third day. Some of these suggested that the café had closed down, and others complained of poor service.

The café owner protested to the review site that all the reviews, despite having different user-names and different locations, were all posted by a mobile phone and all shared a certain writing style. TripAdvisor removed them, but the café owner has pointed out that it only acted in retrospect, on receipt of a complaint – there must always be a period of time before a complaint is acted on, during which unfair reviews remain visible to the world.

The café owner has added the now-familiar complaint that foodservice



'The truth' – or is it?

businesses feel threatened by review sites on which they have no choice about appearing.

"Most business owners I've spoken to don't want to be on it, and feel cornered into checking the site several times daily," the café operator told us.

"Valid opinions are acceptable, but the others can cause damage and heartache.

"The problem is a failure to regulate the review process – anyone can create a false identify and write an exceptionally good review of their own business, or an exceptionally bad review of a competitor.

"I place the blame squarely at TripAdvisor's door for providing an inadequately monitored medium."

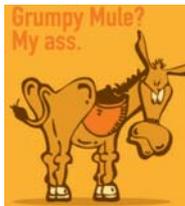
Bewley's renames its UK companies, but the Mule remains!

As was predicted some time ago, Bewley's of Ireland proposes to rename its two recent acquisitions in the UK, Bolling's roastery in Yorkshire and Darlington's in London. However, the Grumpy Mule brand, which has been Bolling's flag-flyer in its progress in putting ethically-sourced speciality coffee through retail in delis and high-class food shops, will remain.

"For us, this makes a lot of sense, and we hope so too for our clients and potential business partners," Coffee House was told by Brendan McDonnell, the director in charge of Bewley's UK operations. "Outside the immediate geographical environment of both locations, Darlington's and Bolling's are actually not that well known by many caterers. Bringing the business together under the Bewley's family umbrella will better reflect that we are one company rather than operating as disparate business units.

"The name change also signals Bewley's commitment to the UK, which is already shown in the expansion of people and resources we have made available. In return for the trust our clients place in us, we will continue to offer expertise and integrity as the essence of our offer."

Apart from the name change, there will be 'no material changes' to day-to-day operations in Yorkshire and London, and both sites will be kept on and are to receive investment.



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The Rubens coffee shop chain is to open its fifth site, at the Albert Dock in Liverpool. It has signed a ten-year lease for the property and reportedly spent £70,000 on refurbishments. The chain opened in West Kirby in 2009, and is also in Heswell, Mold in North Wales and Bromborough.

The North Point coffee shop in St Andrews, where Prince William and Kate Middleton regularly met while at university, is reported to be up for sale. The business has achieved a remarkable amount of fame as a result, with the owner reporting that many people ask to be photographed sitting in the seats that the royal couple used. The cafe has been put on the market for £115,000.

Costa is to open in Cookham, Berkshire, with the usual mixed reaction from local businesses - one tea-shop owner said 'there is no place for such a big company in such a small, beautiful village - Cookham should be about independent businesses'. The local press notes that a pub in the village served Costa coffee for a year, before ending the arrangement.

In Henley, Costa has been banned from having outdoor seating, and told off for putting its seats out on the pavement without getting permission. Turning down a retrospective application, the council said that the pavement would be reduced to an unacceptable width. One of the objectors was a former town mayor.

The takeaway paper-cup maker Huhtamaki has acquired BCP Fluted

Packaging, a corrugated packaging company in Blackburn, Lancashire. Huhtamaki says that BCP's corrugated food-to-go products allow it to offer a wider range to its existing clients.

Coffee Barker has opened its second coffee shop in Cardiff, in the High Street Arcade. The business is run by Stephen and Charlotte Barker, whose original café was in Barker's clothing shop.

Really Awesome Coffee, the mobile coffee-van franchise company, is proposing to expand its franchisees from eight to twenty during the course of next year. In preparation for this, it has done a deal with the Volkswagen Van Centre of Birmingham to create an entire fleet of the brand's vans. One of the company's first mobile units was an old VW van named Al Cappuccino!

The Beach Cafe at Wells-next-the-Sea, Norfolk, has created a dog-friendly club with its own 'dog of the year' award, based on doggie photographs taken at the venue - Alan Miller tells us that he now has 600 dog members!

The Chocolate Café of Henley has organised a charity evening in support of the appeal for aid to victims of the typhoon in the Philippines - one of the café staff is from the area. A star of the charity evening will be the former Radio 1 DJ Mike Read, who will present a pop quiz - he wrote the song for the 2004 Asian tsunami relief appeal, which reached number four in the charts.

Calendar girls reveal all in the coffee house



A café in Ludlow has achieved an interesting seasonal coup by having the original Calendar Girls visit for a fund-raising evening. It is now 15 years since the ladies of a village Women's Institute in Yorkshire had the idea of their not-quite-nude calendar - the idea led to over £4 million raised for charity so far, a world-famous film, and a stage play.

The Girls were invited to the Ludlow Kitchen café by Edward Berry, manager of the Ludlow Food Centre (and formerly with Newby Teas). They have been producing calendars ever since the original one, although the 2014 one will be their last, and do many fund-raising talks.

"We support one charity per year chosen by the staff here, and generally one with a personal story to someone here," Ed Berry told Coffee House. "The Calendar Girls came down from Yorkshire for it, and customers paid £15 for traditional tea and to hear four of the original Girls tell their stories and answer questions. It was a very jolly event!"

A unique Advent calendar has been devised by the Cove coffee bar in Swansea - it is a structure of card storage boxes, each of which contains a work by a local artist. One box is opened each day before Christmas, and proceeds from the sales of the artworks goes to a local charity which supports vulnerable people with homelessness and mental health problems.



An American inventor is looking for 'crowdfunding' investment for a filter brewer which is said to combine the attributes of a pourover and a cafetiere, yet promoted as better-looking, more durable, and easier to hold with hot liquid inside. The item is the Immerset, from inventor Chic Kelly, and features a stainless steel valve that allows the user to control the water going through the coffee. An inner stainless steel screen creates a double-wall effect which allows the item to be picked up, without a handle, even when full. The brewing chamber features a conventional paper filter. The item is supposed to be ready by May, if the Kickstarter funding is achieved.

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Waitrose refuses to budge

Our report last month about complaints over the Waitrose tactic of free coffee to card holders has been followed by yet more complaints on the same subject.

Now, a charity coffee shop in Chandler's Ford which supports a school for orphaned children in Africa has said that the Waitrose campaign has ended its hopes of the African school and orphanage becoming self-sufficient. The operator of the charity café has said that the Waitrose promotion has damaged both the needy children in Africa and the Chandler's Ford community which wishes to support them. Waitrose has again responded with its claim that it donates to local causes.

For the coffee trade, the Beverage Standards Association is the only body to speak out, saying: "we would recommend to Waitrose that they review the promotion, considering the harm it is creating."

Invited to reconsider their position, and asked whether a senior manager might be willing to discuss the subject, Waitrose told us: "our statement is unchanged."

Elsewhere, a separate complaint has been made to a local trading standards office concerning a large retailer which is alleged to have been giving away free beverages for two years, to the detriment of local beverage businesses.

Roaster annoys the church

The ethical headaches of private-label work have arisen in Sioux City, USA, where a not-for-profit micro-roaster which gives work opportunities to people with autism and traumatic brain injuries has been attacked by a church minister as being 'anti-Christian'.

The minister is known for inflammatory speeches against such issues as same-sex marriage and abortion, and had asked to sell the roaster's Jumpy Monkey coffee in his church. The charity which owns the roastery declined to private-label for the church, saying that it wanted to stay neutral on the issues about which the minister campaigned, and that it had a policy of not branding for denominations or special-interest groups (probably for fear of possibly upsetting other customers with other views).

The minister publicly accused the roaster of discrimination against the church, the roaster demanded an apology, and threats of lawsuits are now flying about.



The Starbucks railcar cafe (above) and the original Furchbahn

Readers may recall our story from Zurich in July 2012, concerning the town which turned a carriage in its town's Furchbahn tourist railway into a temporary coffee shop. Starbucks has now done something similar – in partnership with Swiss Federal Railways, it has opened a two-level coffee shop on a passenger train running from the Geneva Airport to St. Gallen. Typically, Starbucks has described it as a 'unique' collaboration.

Patrol for takeaway litter, council tells cafe

The fraught matter of takeaway litter has come to the fore again, but this time with some imaginative ideas – in one case, a council has demanded that a cafe assume some responsibility.

The Foodservice Packaging Association meeting in Nottingham on 16 January will now feature a Litter Summit. The chief executive of Keep Britain Tidy will take part, as will the Industry Council for Packaging and the Environment and the co-ordinator of European Clean-up Day. The discussion is hoped to 'generate solutions from which we intend to produce a course of action for the industry'. (Our readers will know that we have long campaigned for some years for the industry to stand up and say something positive about the litter problem presented by takeaway cups).

Meanwhile, a council has imposed an anti-litter requirement on a high street site. McDonald's has been given permission to use the front of its St Helens site as a pavement café, but in an imaginative move, the local council has said that McDonald's must monitor litter in the immediate area. In return for permission to put out four tables and 16 chairs, the operator must carry out a 'trash walk' along the street five times a day, clear the area of litter every evening, and carry out a weekly deep-clean of the street.

Elsewhere in the takeaway sector, a claim by a European packaging association may not be quite as dramatic as it first appeared.

In a statement last month, the Pack2Go association said that it had met with EU officials in Brussels to discuss action against packaging imports from

China and elsewhere that do not meet European standards and 'may present health and safety risks for European consumers'.

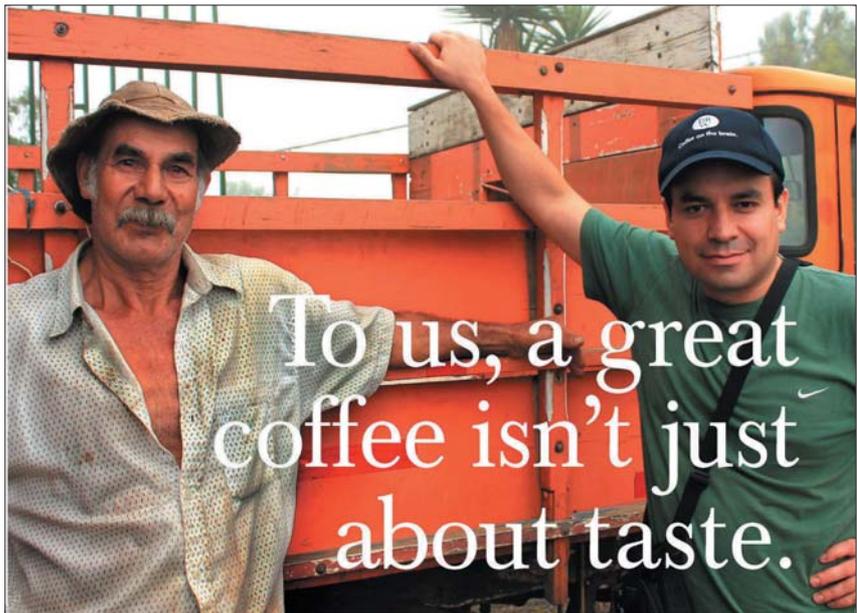
The association said that 'it is just too easy for third-country producers to take shortcuts and get away with it... reports out of China show that locally manufactured packaging is not even meeting Chinese rules. It's naive to think they are meeting ours'.

This magazine asked Pack2Go to clarify the extent to which imported takeaway beverage cups are unsafe. The carefully unspecific response was: "takeaway hot beverage cups may be affected."

When we suggested that European manufacturers might be considered scaremongering if they could not produce any evidence, Pack2Go replied:

"An industry study done by the International Food Packaging Association in China found that eighty per cent of the samples taken in Beijing of paper cups for instant noodles and milk tea had excessive fluorescent whitening agent."

"The International Food Packaging Association said it was very likely that the sub-standard packagings were made from recycled paper, or even wastepaper that is not suitable for packaging food and drinks. There is nothing to suggest that packaging sent to Europe would not suffer from the same laxity, which is why we should be more vigilant in the EU."



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There's a neat little twist to the 'brew guide' published by UE Espresso of Witney in Oxfordshire. In the section on Aeropress brewing, they give only the guide for the 'inverted' method, not the standard method, saying that they find this gives the best results. In this method, you quite literally turn the Aeropress upside down before putting the coffee and the hot water in; it is of course a good idea to make sure you've put the little paper filter and holder in before you turn it back round again.

The Old Station tea-room at Tintern, in the Wye valley, has won the 'best café in Wales' title at the National Tourism Awards for Wales. The tea room is in an old railway station building on the banks of the Wye, the boundary between England and Wales, and is owned by Monmouthshire County Council.

The One4Six coffee shop in Aylesbury, run by brothers Nick and Giuseppe Iannelli, has undergone a makeover reportedly costing £200,000. The café, which has been open for four years, has taken advantage of a neighbouring 1200 sq.m. of retail space which became available. The developed coffee shop will contain an in-house kitchen and a traditional ice cream parlour with artisan gelato made on the premises, making up an 18-flavour menu with weekly specials.

Picnic Cornwall, the Falmouth coffee shop and deli, is a finalist in the

2014 Food Reader awards by Food magazine. Owner Emma Douglas said: "we were speechless - we are flattered that our customers have taken the time to nominate us. Just one or two nominations would have been amazing, but we're told that we received a good share of 3,500 nominations in the café category."

There are more complaints of railway authorities turning away from privately-run and family-run coffee shops on their station premises - in the latest instance, the press in Reading has reported 'desperate disappointment' that a long-established private café has not been given a unit on the station's new passenger footbridge, which opens in April. Hotel Chocolat, Boots, The Cornish Pasty Company, Upper Crust, and Starbucks are there, but not the Tutti Frutti café, which has operated in the station's arcade for two years, and at one point was the top-rated café on a comparison website. In May, a First Great Western spokesman told the local paper: "we absolutely recognise the benefits the right mix of local specialist and national outlets will bring to the station." However, following the decision, the paper reported a local commuter as saying: "this is a depressing, short-sighted decision which sends out a message about how Reading wants to be seen by visitors - as a clone town, rather than one that rewards individuality, entrepreneurs and excellent customer service."

Contract caterers get serious in coffee

There has been an intriguing follow-up to one of the committee appointments at the Speciality Coffee Association of Europe - the choice of Tim Sturk, training manager for the Baxter Storey contract catering organisation, is the first time such a business has been represented and is thought indicative of the way that the concept of 'speciality coffee' has developed through the general catering industry.

That was followed almost immediately by an entrant from Baxter Storey winning the championship run by Union Hand-Roasted of London. All entrants were Union customers, and one travelled from Scotland to take part.

The winner was Jana Slamova of Baxter Storey, with second place going to Alex Sargeant of Strangers Coffee in Norwich (he was a top 20 finalist in the UK barista contest earlier this year).

"The signature drinks showed a lot of thought," reported Union's Alan Miller. "Because of the time of year, they used a lot of chocolate, ginger and orange."

"Damian Winnicki from Medlar (a Michelin-starred restaurant) mixed a shot of Revelation espresso in a



shaker with ice cubes, pineapple juice, cinnamon, a thick almond chocolate paste and double cream. He served the mix in a traditional martini glass that had one side dipped in lime juice and sugar. The result was perfect alongside a brownie or a moist chocolate cake!"



Another tea room has seen the attraction of burlesque - the Tea Bar of Basingstoke becomes The Tease Bar for one night in mid-December. It is surprising how many have taken up this idea - the first one we came across was Volupte in London, but we now find burlesque teas in various cities, including one mobile service, one 'burlesque lessons' offer, and in Glasgow, 'afternoon tease' with 'the infamous Miss Hell's Belle'. The Basingstoke event, for over 18s only, is priced at £14.50 per head, which is quite low compared to some venues.

Another call has been made for highways authorities and utilities managers to be more sensitive to the needs of local business when planning roadworks - in this case, the manager of a tea-room at a Welsh beauty spot has complained that he has had to lay off staff because of a 'needless' diversion that is taking customers away from his business. Phil Facey, of the Tan y Pistyll tearoom and tourism centre at the Llanrhaeadr waterfall, a tourist attraction known as 'one of the seven wonders of Wales', says diversion signs for pipe renewal work send drivers on an eight-mile roundabout trip, for no good reason - had the water board thought about it, they could have used another route, and not affected local businesses. The water board says that diversion routes are designed by the county council, and added: "we are aware of the impact we are having on local businesses, and we do sympathise." It has been pointed out on many occasions that if utilities companies discussed these matters with local businesses beforehand, more practical arrangements could often be made.

The tea packaging specialist Infusion GB has begun printing 'best before' directly onto enveloped tea bags, as a result of demand from clients - the company produces string, tagged and enveloped tea bags for such brands as Pukka Herbs, Twinings, Tetley and Lipton. The technical puzzle was apparently in finding a coding and marking solution that could match the speeds of tea packing machines which produce 250 bags per minute. Sebastian Pole and Tim Westwell of Pukka Herbs recently took part in the Food and Hotel exhibition in Shanghai. The brand now sells to 40 countries and export accounts for half of its business.

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Retail sale ambitions need real retail packs, says new brand

Cafes and delis who want to make the most of retail coffee sales have to do something special with packaging, says the creator of the new Black or White range – according to Phil Binns, better sales come from packaging seriously designed for over-the-counter business, not from an everyday roaster's bag.

Black or White is a new range under his established Seasons for Coffee brand.

"Traders tend to close the door on 'coffee salesmen'... one more turning up with a bag of coffee is of no interest to them. However, they do get interested in someone who is able to talk seriously about the retailing of coffee.

"So, what we have done is develop a coffee range which is aimed at being retailed through coffee shops and delis. Six hundred of these have gone out to the trade in one weekend!"

There are essential differences in strategy, he says.

"You find that most coffee suppliers who supply 'retail' products do so as whole beans in a bag... but most retail customers don't have grinders, or understand grinds. So we supply a ground coffee which will work for both espresso and filter – I see nothing wrong with an 'omnigrind', because retail customers aren't like baristas."

Some of the items in the Black or White range duplicate items in the Seasons trade range – the San Anise and Rainforest Alliance coffees are in both.

"A lot of our clients said they wanted those items. They are our two most popular coffees, and this allows operators to say: 'glad you liked it, you can buy it in a jar'. We also have a range of 25gm sample packs which traders can give away, to help customers buy into the brand."

The blending and packing is by Lincoln and York; the Rainforest coffee



is the one used by the Watermark in Scarborough, which was that roaster's 'coffee shop of the year'.

The RRP for the tins is £6.95 for 250gm; trade margin is about fifty per cent.

Kelly wins the OK

Dame Kelly Holmes is going to be allowed to open her coffee house in Hildenborough. In what was reported to be a 'heated' debate, Tonbridge and Malling borough councillors approved plans for the former Fags and Mags newsagents in London Road to be converted into a cafe. Neighbours living had raised concerns over noise, lack of parking, loss of privacy and the size of the development, and the athlete had been asked to revise her plans. Opening hours and number of covers have been reduced, and plans for an upstairs bridal area and children's play area have been removed.

In a novel display of generosity, a man with a sign scrawled on cardboard has sat down outside a branch of Caffé Nero in Aylesbury - not in the hope of receiving money, but of giving it away. The man decided on his 'random act of kindness' to celebrate the fact that he has 'a job, a home, a car, and good health', and his placard carried a message inviting passers-by to let him give them £2 for a coffee.

He later reported that many people simply ignored his offer, or read the sign and refused to believe him. Delightfully, the first person to take the money went straight into the café to buy a coffee, which she then presented to him! Within half an hour, he gave away about £30, having already decided that he would match the amount he gave with a donation for the same amount to Children in Need. What passers-by did not see was that he had a video camera recording the reactions of everyone who came near him. (Caffé Nero told us: "it made our day" and asked if the man had a loyalty card!)



Yet another new tea brand has cropped up - this is Tea Huggers, by Esther Thompson. Again, this is a pyramid-bag collection in the familiar kind of vertical retail tea packaging, but the launch range features seven 'well-being' blends: "This is a herbal range which is targeted at specific lifestyle needs such as getting up, chilling out, getting to sleep," Esther tells us. The blends feature such ingredients as yerba mate, ginseng, ginkgo, and the labels use phrases such as 'for positivity'. An interesting seasonal one is Flu Fighter, which has echinacea, apple, orange peel, elderflower, rosehip, hibiscus, and is blended with 'lots of sympathy'!

KeepCup, the Australian reusable takeaway cup which has achieved a remarkable following around the world, is to launch a new version of the product - it is testing a glass version. It has been reported in America that 'while the brand's original product was successful worldwide, some potential users expressed concern to KeepCup over putting hot beverages into plastic containers'. This remark is of particular interest to this magazine, because when we raised exactly the same point to KeepCup three years ago, the suggestion was more or less dismissed...!

Chris Morris has opened CoW (Coffee on Woor) in Falkirk, and says it is the town's first artisan coffee bar. He has said that Falkirk is becoming a destination town with a growing coffee culture and growing opportunity for daytime coffee. He told the local paper that he waited three years for the time to be right.

The bubble tea phenomenon has reached Bath - Bubbly has been opened in Little South Gate by Gareth and Emma Lloyd, as an unusual mix of bubble tea and a digital graffiti wall. The graffiti wall allows for customers' pictures to be uploaded and shared on Facebook and Twitter.

The Gylly Beach Cafe of Falmouth, which recently hosted the town's barista contest, has now won a gold award from the Green Tourism organisation, being one of 15 category winners from a total of 2,400 entrants. The national awards aim to honour businesses which promote sustainability through cost-saving practices.

My Coffee and Co has opened up in Worcester city centre. The owners, Debbie Coulter and Jeff Whiteley, intend to build a small chain. They said that Worcester is currently an ideal location as it is an area attracting large visitor numbers, but as yet not over-run with coffee shops. Also in Worcester, the Coffee Dough, or 'CODO', café has opened in the 'glass pavilion' food area. The owners, Ilir Fazliu, Adam Edney and Steve Sosna, say their business is 'not your typical coffee shop - it's a luxury environment'.

The Cobwebs tea shop has been opened by Kerry Bender and William Penno in Pentewan, Cornwall - the aim is to become a 'community hub'.

A pub chain has created its own coffee brand. The Welsh brewer SA Brain, which made a significant move into the coffee sector a couple of years ago when it bought the Coffee #1 café chain, has created the Great Little Coffee Company. This now has an effect on the coffee served in its pubs - at the time

of the acquisition of the chain, he asked if this would affect the use of Costa in its sites, and no direct response was made. However, at the recent Pub Retail Summit, the brewery's retail director Philip Lay reportedly announced that Costa coffee would be replaced by its new brand in 95 pubs.

There is a curious story concerning the Caffé Nero chain's activities in the USA. According to the American press, the chain is to open its first US store in Boston - a local real estate agency has said that the café will open early in the new year. Other American media suggested the agent got excited and spoke too early about plans which were not supposed to be made public. Caffé Nero tells us it has nothing to say about it...!

Yet another combined coffee shop and bike repair shop has opened. Adele Procter and Martin Harman have opened Your Bike Shed in York. The couple told their local paper that the idea came from Bangkok, curiously omitting to refer to the existing British cycle-themed cafes, but also mentioned that York apparently has the second largest cycling community in the country.

Coffee Republic is back on the franchise trail - it has opened four new franchised sites in London, at Marble Arch, Bromley, Wood Green and Putney, and is to open six more in London and the home counties in the next few months, and another in the Odeon, Glasgow.

The coffee equipment business Machina Espresso has opened its first retail premises and coffee shop today in Edinburgh, after establishing itself online. The company mission is to make choosing and buying coffee gear 'straightforward and enjoyable'. The company is run by Steve Glencross, and will run coffee-focused events and film and music evenings.

The Lonton Coffee Company of Teesdale has been awarded a grant of £15,000 to set up an artisan roasting facility and create four new jobs. The business was founded by Scott Patrick, in an old lime kiln in Upper Teesdale. The grant from the North East Rural Growth Network will help him install a roaster and de-stoning equipment, convert an existing farm building into a roasting area for bean storage, packaging and dispatching, and office space.

Caracoli, the award-winning Alresford-based deli/cafe, has opened its fourth site, in Farnham. Caracoli won the food category of the Telegraph's Best Small Shops in Britain Awards 2012. It has branches in Alresford, Winchester and Guildford and a headquarters in Twyford.

For the everyday high street coffee trader, the matter of coffee pricings is a minefield... indeed, probably something to stay well away from. And yet, nobody in the business can fail to have noticed that something has gone quite crazy with regard to coffee prices – at a time when they were expected to be high, they have plummeted.

The situation is very complex, and only professional coffee traders come anywhere close to understanding it. Typically, certain countries are producing low quantities, and certain Central American countries have had their crops ravaged by the roya pest, at a time when worldwide consumption and demand are increasing. By the rules of supply and demand, this should mean high prices.

But prices have gone downwards. According to the International Coffee Organisation, the monthly averages in November remained so low that at one point the commodity price dipped below a dollar a pound. The ICO wrote: "in real terms, the indicator is now below the level of January 2000, which marked the beginning of the period known as the 'coffee crisis'."

The UK has several very experienced traders in green coffee, and one of them is Stephen Hurst of Mercanta, the 'coffee hunter', who has the unusual talent of being bi-lingual and able to speak with coffee farmers in their own language.

It is a cruel market, he told us – some farmers go bust, but for we consuming countries who pay big money for quality coffee, it is not a disastrous one.

There are two coffee parts to the coffee market – 'commodity' coffee, which includes anything that might go into instant coffee or a giant brand's blend, and 'speciality' coffee, which is the good stuff that artisan roasters bid for. It is in the commodity sector where the price drops have been felt.

While the commodity market reports a dollar a pound for green coffee, the Cup of Excellence auctions, where the very best speciality coffees are bid for, gives another picture.

Recently, in Brazil, one coffee went at auction for \$23.10 per pound, roughly double the price of the top coffee from the same area last year. In Colombia, several sold for over twenty dollars a pound; in Costa Rica, the top price was \$30.10. In El Salvador, one coffee sold for \$50.10 per pound, and in Guatemala the top crop sold at \$45.10 per pound.

The commodity price has an effect on the quality of big-brand coffee - it has always been known that when prices go up, the big brands may 'adjust' their blends, so they can use lower-priced coffee.

"The commodity sector is where people 'swap'," agreed Hurst. "To commodity buyers, coffee is an utterly interchangeable product, and so far as they are concerned, a Peruvian is the same to them as a Mexican. If the

No apocalypse yet, says the coffee hunter

The price of commodity coffee is at an unexpected low, and the international business press is full of panic stories. Should the good-coffee trade be worried?



Stephen Hurst at origin in Colombia

Nicaraguan is too expensive, they'll change to the Honduran."

Does this adjustment make financial sense? The International Business Times reported last month that 'Starbucks expects to save \$100 million in fiscal year 2013 from declining commodity costs'.

"I believe it," remarked Hurst dryly.

"An interesting phenomenon came in the run-up to the high price of \$3 a few years ago. The arbitrage, which is the difference between the arabica price and the robusta, was the highest it had ever been (today it's the least it has ever been).

"It took the big brands so long to adjust their blends one way, that by the time they'd done it, the market had moved back the other way! It was almost hilarious..."

However, he says, the speciality market is different. But there are still unfairnesses, and everything is not entirely better or fair in this sector. Nor, he alleges, are all claims of fair buying prices entirely true. It is time, he suggests, that more coffee marketers were open about what they really pay, relating their prices to the reality of farming, not the commodity indicators.

"The market is a lottery, a casino. There is just too much smoke-and-mirrors, too much mumbo-jumbo. I go up against many people who say they are paying a sustainable price, and they aren't!

"A lot of people have conveniently forgotten that 'sustainability' is not about where coffee comes from – it's about what you pay for it.

"It's quite simple. It costs about \$1.40 per pound to produce in the speciality market, and my company is the only one in the world which guar-

antees to pay twenty per cent more than the production cost.

"We don't work on the 'price to be fixed' kind of contract, but a lot of 'speciality' buyers do, irrespective of what they may tell you.

"In this, the buyer may commit to buy a thousand bags for shipment next April, and the seller can fix the price... that is, between now and then, he can choose the day on which the coffee price is one he likes. It was the big banks who gave a free bet in this, and it turned out to be one of the most destructive things ever to happen in the coffee business

"It sounds fine, except when the price never reaches the sustainable level. The guy on the farm waits for ever for it to do so, until he reaches the point where he has to throw the towel in.

"We have drawn a line in the sand which not many have dared to do. All my business is done on a fixed price, above the cost of production."

This, adds Hurst, brings in the curious question of ethical certifications which speak of a guaranteed minimum price related to the worldwide commodity price. If the guaranteed minimum doesn't meet the farmer's cost of production, he is hardly any better off.

How much of the world crop counts as 'speciality', and how much counts as 'commodity'?

When the world's press runs scare stories, as in November, saying: 'speciality coffee production in places like Costa Rica, a major producer, is declining slowly, falling 35 percent in the past decade', should we worry?

Speciality coffee comes from careful farming, and to a degree, from the right geographic conditions. In Stephen Hurst's view, the amount of well-grown speciality coffee in the world should not be a problem – there need be no shortage of it.

"Speciality coffee is about three per cent of the total market, but it is more limited by the ability of the market to buy it, than by the farmer's ability to grow it. Globally, we could find a great deal more speciality coffee, and there are a number of regions where growing it is quite possible.

"There is a vast amount of potential for speciality coffee. It is not running out... it is the people who are willing to pay for it who are running out!"

"If Costa Rica produced no more coffee, nobody would miss it..."

because there is no shortage. Other places are growing as much to make up, and more again. There is no shortage on a worldwide basis.

"Globally, I rarely see people abandoning coffee – some of the new generation will always sell the family farm, because they can get more by selling it for a golf course than for working coffee for twenty years, but it makes no difference, because some other places are not adding the odd hectare, they're adding thousands.

"Honduras has enough capacity to cater for the entire global growth in demand. Even Africa has made a twenty per cent yield improvement, although some of it is rubbish. Vietnam has also gone from nothing to thirty million bags."

Some origins have not gone down at all.

"Why is the price of Sumatran coffee counter-intuitive? Their prices are going the other way because they are distinctive – you can't substitute them. You can swap a Honduras and a Guatemala, and thousands of bags do move from one side of a border to the other and are sold as a different origin... but Sumatrans, just like an Indian Monsooned, are completely irreplaceable. Their prices will live independently.

"The doomsday scenarios are ridiculous. I see no evidence of any effect in the total scheme of things."

An intriguing report reaches us from Colombia, where a senior member of the country's coffee-producing sector raised the possibility of the country developing a business in growing robusta coffee – and was met with a reportedly 'hostile' response.

The idea was to plant robusta, the rougher lower-grade crop used in instant coffee and as a bulking-out coffee in some espresso blends, in some areas of Colombia which are described as 'largely desolate plains', and where the crop could be machine-harvested, unlike the labour-intensive arabica crop of the hill country. He pointed out that robusta could be more profitable, and that certain countries already grow both coffees.

However, the country's coffee farmers protested that the idea would detract from the reputation of Colombia's main coffee output, and heckled him repeatedly.



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There is a name in coffee supply which has kept cropping up with some regularity in recent years, mainly in the news of big contract wins - among its multi-site contract successes have been well over a hundred universities, a couple of dozen forces bases, 27 motorway service areas, the AMF bowling alley chain, and the biggest purchasing consortium in the hospitality trade. Elsewhere, its single-site clients include the Belfry hotel and golf centre.

The supplier is the Wicked Coffee Company of Wetherby, in which managing director Fergus Walsh has maintained his 'wicked but fair' slogan by working extensively with Fairtrade products. His success with multi-site national contracts has come partly from that, and partly from one very curious aspect of his company... he has no sales team.

This, we put to Fergus, is curious. In winning national accounts, he must have been up against the much bigger suppliers in the industry.

"We employ no salespeople, because when we did, it was a disaster," Fergus told us candidly. "So we go in with no brochures, and no 'collateral'. We have no sales strategy to 'attack' business.

"We just go in and talk. Winning a client is one thing - keeping them is another.

"We are national suppliers, from Inverness to Cornwall, and in the last ten years, we have lost one client... and that was a single site.

Wicked, but fair...

How is it that an independent coffee supplier has won such a collection of major national accounts, against giant competitors?



Fergus Walsh
of
Wicked Coffee

"There are not many independent national service companies like us around!"

Before Wicked, Fergus Walsh was with the giant contract caterer Compass. This, he suggests, helps him bring more to a client than just selling at them.

"It gives me an understanding of the other side of all this. We aren't a supplier who can only talk about coffee, and I find I am able to talk to café clients about foodservice in general, which helps us discuss about what the client really needs in their business,

not just about what we want to sell.

"You do see a lot of overkill in 'sales'. You see big coffee machines which should never have been sold to the venues who are using them - but the salesmen have done what they are employed to do, sell.

"I see too many salesmen coming to me who are 'selling product'. They aren't that good at selling confidence in their company, and that, I suspect, is why we do so well in having no sales teams."

As some coffee suppliers do, Wicked exerts a slightly-demanding attitude to its clients.

"We are not keen on the kind of catering trade customer who doesn't want training, who won't clean their machine, and whose first question is price! We also do ask that clients accept our quality auditing, and our mystery-shopper visits. As a result, there is a lot of catering business we won't go for.

"However, those on the high street who love their coffee are now coming to us. Previously, we didn't have so many coffee house clients, but this market is beginning to come to us... we had three such approaches last week."

There are some curiosities about Wicked's blends, which are created in partnership with a contract roaster, with some success - the Fairtrade Italian Roast espresso got a Great Taste award this year, and the Diavolo did the same last year.

"These are our own blends, not stock blends from a roaster. Diavolo is to compete against the high street cafes - it has performed very favourably against Costa in several contract tastings. The important thing is that neither of them is blended down to meet a price."

They are however Fairtrade, a subject about which Fergus has mixed opinions. On the one hand, he has no time for the view that Fairtrade coffees continue to be of less than speciality

standard, but he does share the general exasperation with support from the Fairtrade authorities.

"There are many Fairtrade coffees out there, and you must seek out the quality ones... and there are plenty of them to be had. I was brought up in East Africa, which is why we always have one of their coffees in our blends. There are some nice Ethiopian Fairtrades at the moment, and the Tanzanian Fairtrade robusta is very decent.

"Those who say there aren't good Fairtrade coffees aren't looking hard enough - although it can be very difficult to find them at the very highest-quality single-origin level."

Promoting Fairtrade Fortnight is a mixed bag, he agrees, because of the uncertainty of practical support from the Foundation.

"To be honest, there is no pro-active help. We used to use their point-of-sale items, but now we do our own thing, and supply our own posters... we have to, because there's no help!

"And there is less reaction to Fairtrade than there used to be - there's no doubt that interest is in decline. But we have 140 university outlets, and in these places, Fairtrade interest can still be very active."

“ I see too many salesmen who are 'selling product'. They aren't that good at selling confidence in their company ”

Other ethical promotions have had mixed success. A few years ago, Wicked created the Jungle Blend, in support of a conservation organisation. It was, Fergus recalls with a slight exasperation, almost a great success.

"Jungle was developed for profits to go back to the wildlife organisation, and so we cut away every single middleman, and were sourcing the coffee ourselves. The farmers gave guarantees about wildlife conservation, and not allowing rainforest logging.

"It was a very difficult job, and although the ethics and the cause were spot-on, and we did make donations, it was not enough for all the effort we put in."

But was the coffee good enough?

"Oh yes - at one point the World Bank wanted to put it in every one of their offices worldwide!"

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There is a clear similarity between two 'artisan' worlds, both of which came to attention a few years ago, and both of which continue to develop. We now have the twin phenomena of the artisan coffee bar and the artisan bakery, and in many places the two are now working on the same premises as a joint business.

The fields of top-class bakery and high-quality coffee are clearly moving together, and just as the high-priced coffee is now familiar and accepted, that is happening with artisan bread... there actually are areas where the £5 loaf is not uncommon.

A fascinating example is the Euphorium bakery of London, which has teamed up with Kimbo coffee, and has now even developed a coffee lounge in its new site in Threadneedle Street, in the centre of London's banking area.

This is not something to be seen as a one-off, remarks Angus McKenzie, managing director of Kimbo UK. There are interesting lessons to be learned from what Euphorium has done.

"Is this a modern phenomenon? The market for high-quality bakery certainly is now phenomenal. It is not only in London that £4-£5 loaves sell out in hours, and there is a distinct synergy between the bakery and the coffee. It is a winning combination at a high margin.

"The link goes back to before we had thought of the word 'artisan'! In those days, the coffee wasn't great and the bread wasn't great, but they were both cheap and comforting.

"I'm a great believer in the idea that the market can tell you something, and what the arrival of the flat white taught us was something about the way coffee should be made... after we had allowed milky coffees to get super-sized. It said to the catering trades that you can sell something smaller and better at a higher price, and the rest of the trade said: 'we'll have some of that!'

"Now, the key message to the café trade is probably this: where you have a core competence in your own business which makes it a defining factor in why people come to you, then it makes sense to find a partner who shares your level of commitment, in their own core competence.

"Allow your partner to be as studious in their operation as you are in yours, and you will reap the rewards.

"If your core competence is coffee, then you must apply the same principles when looking at your baked products - you may decide to bake-off onsite, or you may decide to partner with a delivering baker who is as nuts about his product as you are with yours. Either way, to have bakery 'to die for' is the phrase every café should aspire to - it's not enough to see bakery as a product line you buy in because you have to.

Look, touch... and nibble!

The Euphorium Bakery in London has taken a radical approach to its use of space – and its use of coffee



"Look at the science that the burger bars are now putting into the different breads they offer... that must tell you something!"

It is a principle that works both ways, says McKenzie. In the case of

how you work the queue and call the coffee orders, and so on - Euphorium have seen this, whereas for some other bakers, it's still a bit of an ask!

"You can really define caterers as those who have coffee 'by design' and

any size of site or business.

"What Euphorium have also done is the entire opposite of 'look but don't touch'. Euphorium says: 'look, touch, nibble!'

"You can look at samples as a promotion or an expense - in Italian bars, there is often a great deal of free nibbling material, some ham or cheese, to thank you for your custom. Krispy Kreme once said that of the people they gave a free doughnut to, half of them came back and bought a dozen!"

Giving customers the opportunity to walk around before they approach the main serving counter offers them a big feeling of freedom within retail space.

What Euphorium has also done is to provide an open stairway leading up to the Arabica coffee lounge, a rather small upstairs area on an open gallery - it's easy for the customers up there to look down into the main shop, and those downstairs can easily see the lounge exists. It is, observes Angus McKenzie, satisfying for those up there to feel they have 'discovered' somewhere interesting.

The bar is small, but there is a coffee menu divided into the Welcome blend, the Mysterious Visitor guest blend, and the taster blend, which turned out to be a decaf. (The guest coffee is a Kimbo, just like the ones on the main menu).

"There was a worry that the upstairs area would be seen as an overflow for downstairs. But what they did was the opposite of others who worry about cost per square foot. They created a little oasis area of maybe sixteen seats which customers could 'discover' for themselves... and it works."

There is more in this partnership than a coming-together of a baker and

“ *There is often a look of confusion on customers' faces when they come in. Now, you can have confusion which equals panic... or you can have the kind of confusion which equals excitement!* ”

- Angus McKenzie, Kimbo

Euphorium, the situation was of a quality baker which needed a coffee partner and chose Kimbo, the Neapolitan brand whose UK division has seen a fifty per cent rise in business over 2012.

"What Euphorium said to us was: 'we have looked at our coffee, we have decided we are not doing it well enough, and we want to do it seriously'.

"Now, it takes a lot to be big enough to say that you're not doing something properly! Egos often get in the way, but when you're big enough to appreciate this, then you're on the way to doing it well.

"For a baker, this means looking at everything about coffee, including

those who have it 'by default'. Those who have it 'by default' serve coffee because they have to... those who have it 'by design' have devised a coffee strategy to compete in the market."

For Euphorium, coffee became a part of a fascinating design job in Threadneedle Street.

The ground-floor space is deliberately 'open' - instead of being confronted by a counter, customers walk into an open space which features a central display counter, with many opportunities to pick up and taste samples (including the soup). An open stairway leads to the separate Arabica coffee lounge upstairs.

"They have invested in space," observes Angus McKenzie. "Normally, an architect would have put five times as many seats in a space like this.

"This is why there is often a look of confusion on customers' faces when they come in. Now, you can have confusion which equals panic, or you can have the kind of confusion which equals excitement, and that is something you can work to achieve with



A typical Euphorium invitation – taste the soup of the day

a coffee roaster, observes McKenzie. It is a demonstration of the concept that other trades take coffee seriously enough to invest in it, with regard to serious, practical staff training. Kimbo is a growing brand that really only arrived here a few years ago, but has demonstrated its intentions with plans for a nationwide set of barista training schools.

When a brand like McDonalds starts advertising their coffee more than their burgers, that tells us something, suggests Kimbo. It means that McDonalds may have done more to democratise coffee and put it in the common vocabulary than the biggest coffee chains have — and a very valuable lesson is to see just how much training effort it put in to reach that improvement.

That training effort, says Angus McKenzie, is practical training aimed at improving high street business, not elite-falutin' training aimed at creating elite barista champions.

"I'd rather train up a hundred good baristas than ten exceptional ones," he maintains. "When the high street baristas we've trained start tweeting and Facebooking pictures of their drinks, saying 'look what I can do!', then you can see that we are making an impression on the high street trade.

"We are now looking at establishing barista schools around the country, and in our experience, our job is now to replace bad habits and show people how to do it properly.

"Too many barista trainers operate like magicians — they show you the trick, but are reluctant to explain how it's done. We tell you everything!"

It does not demand excessive Kimbo branding in return.

"Today we have a little less of the Kimbo... who?" laughs McKenzie. "But it is more important for us to be in cafes that care, rather than concentrate on the consumer knowing our name.

"With Euphorium, our name can be seen discreetly on takeaway cups and uniforms. We have taken their coffee to a very high level — we've put a member of staff onsite for eighteen days straight when they opened, we're that serious. We've already certified twenty of their staff to level-one barista standard.

"Does this work? It certainly does — when you get clients moving up to five or six kilos a day because of the standard of their coffee, you're helping them do very good business!"

And in turn, says Angus McKenzie, this points to a change in attitude on the part of many caterers and the way they source their coffee.

"Caterers in general today are more willing to change their coffee brand and the way they buy it.

"At one time they would not — they would say, 'we know our coffee isn't great, but it's what we know and it's what we always serve'.

"Now, instead of asking how cheap they can buy it, they say: 'how can you help me sell more coffee?'"

The craftsman doughnut

One of the most important bakery products for the coffee shop sector is the doughnut. It is a staple part of American coffee house legend and in the UK is the core business of Krispy Kreme, who have worked very seriously on matching it with good coffee. The Dunkin' Donuts chain, which failed to make an impact when it first attempted to cross the Atlantic, is soon to re-appear here.

And yet, in the vast majority of cases, the coffee shop doughnut is a bought-in commodity product which really does not command a premium price — cafes put themselves in the same market as the cheap supermarket five-for-a-pound doughnut.

And yet, it can be argued that the doughnut has something in common with the muffin or the flapjack. You can either go downmarket and buy cheap, or you can source upmarket and sell at a premium.

That is the argument now put forward by Dan Tse and Tim Pearson of North London, who last month quite deliberately invited a collection of London's top coffee-shop owners to their launch of 'gourmet doughnuts'.

What constitutes a 'gourmet' doughnut?

"Fine ingredients, made with traditional methods (we hand-knead), good quality control and good product ideas," Dan told us. "The basic make-up is of a good strong white bread flour, a little egg, sugar, a tiny touch of salt, and some solid vegetable fat... traditionalists say lard, but we prefer vegetable fat. Then yeast and water, and maybe cocoa powder or ginger depending on the recipe.

"The heating method is frying, and the reason you don't see a lot of doughnuts from café kitchens is because of the ventilation... equally, many bakeries don't have the ventilation to cope. The most specialist equipment is the proving trays and cooling racks, not the fryer."

The concept of the bake-off doughnut, in which the café finishes off a part-baked product, as with many breads, is not reckoned to be sufficiently 'correct'.

"I would be surprised if someone had not created the bake-off doughnut — but there is no real alternative to the fried doughnut. And a good reason why coffee houses do not want to fry doughnuts in-house is because anything fried will stink...and you do not ruin your core line for the sake of one other product, however good it is. Your customers expect the smell of coffee!"

(Bake-off doughnuts are actually used by the Tim Hortons café chain of Canada — the final bake and glazing is done at high-street level).

"There is also," says Dan Tse, "a whole train of thought simply with regard to shelf life. One supplier boasts about their doughnuts lasting nine or ten days — well, that's OK for a petrol-station doughnut, but from a coffee-house point of view that's the worst concept in the world. Too much of the wrong stuff has been pumped into that kind of doughnut.

"Our distribution base will be Islington, and delivery in London will be by Vespa and pushbike. It will be early-morning work bakery, and then out on two wheels.

"But we have had the idea of 'sale or donate'. At the moment, nobody is sure what quantities the coffee-house will sell in a day, and there's no point in us taking back unsold doughnuts, so we think donation of unsold ones to homeless causes is a good idea."

How does the café owner relate to the opportunity of doughnuts and coffee?

"I presume that doughnuts are not commonplace in UK coffee shops as there are virtually no suppliers of quality doughnuts that measure up to the brownies and pastries. The opportunity has not been there for the coffee house operator to exploit.

"So the doughnut world so far has been the supermarkets, the Krispy Kreme operation, and the Dunkin' Donuts operation which is to be returning to the UK. Those two



A gourmet doughnut — the blackberry glazed Eton Mess

got it absolutely right — for their market. Krispy Kreme up and down the country does seem to be the go-to place for the Friday doughnut run or the office birthday doughnuts.

"I believe their business to be very profitable, but I would describe it as a wide variety of standard doughnuts rather than 'gourmet'. We're approaching a different market with a different product, and for the independent operator, there has been no source of the gourmet doughnut — maybe one or two tiny ones, but nothing you would consider the go-to supplier."

The commodity doughnut is not the profitable doughnut, says Dan Tse.

"We're talking proper gourmet product at proper prices. 'Artisan' is an over-used term, but with fresh quality ingredients, worked by an experienced hand, you'll find that there are interesting doughnut concepts to be found, and products which can bring in £2-£3.

“ The speciality doughnut is a sector which does not yet exist in the UK ”

"For a doughnut to reach that price, you have to be talking about a 'craftsman doughnut'. (And that's a phrase you don't often hear!) And from the interest we have seen coming back from coffee houses, the potential is bigger than we thought."

How does a café promote the gourmet doughnut?

"You make a feature of it, because this is going to be something unexpected and different.

"When someone is sent out from the office to pick up coffee and cakes from the coffee-shop, the likely product choice is quite obvious — but doughnuts are different. The line 'we now sell gourmet doughnuts' should be sufficient to start interest... better, the phrase: 'this is new, we are one of the first cafes in the world to offer gourmet doughnuts, try them now'."

What is the realistic spread of types and flavours to offer?

"We are talking to a lot of coffee house owners about a limited number of varieties, some permanent and some 'guest doughnuts'. You can relate doughnuts to three types — the ball doughnut with sugar outside and a filling, the ring doughnut with a glaze, and the speciality doughnut, a sector which doesn't yet exist in the UK.

For example, we have a brulee doughnut — a ball, sugar-rolled, with a cream and passion-fruit filling, and brulee-torched on the outside."

However, Glazed and Confused will also be avoiding fad and fashion doughnuts. "We're not touching cronuts or duffins with a bargepole! We don't want to be associated with a fad product that we think will fall quickly out of fashion... when a fad goes, it drags your brand down with it."

Bernard, a blend to rely on

The Pink Lane Coffee company from Newcastle has now created its own roastery, and its first blend has the slightly unusual name of... Bernard.

The Pink Lane café is run by Anth and Jen Atkinson, who have converted an outbuilding at their home into the new roastery; the unit was intended to be sited at the café, but was delayed for a year owing to fuel-line problems.

The name of the first blend is a deliberate reflection of the identity of the coffee – their café has been a multi-roaster business, using guest coffees from some of the UK's best suppliers, but for their home-roasted coffee the couple decided they wanted to create a blend which carried an image of solid reliability... so, instead of going for one of the cool and wacky names favoured by several roasters, they decided on 'Bernard'!

"Bernard is a 50/50 blend of a Brazil and Guatemalan," Anth told us. "It's a good espresso that is chocolate, hazelnuts and a bit of citrus acidity. We wanted our first espresso to be approachable, not too challenging.

"We were struggling with thinking of a cool name for it like Stumptown's Hairbender or Workshop's Cult of Done, so we thought we would give the coffee names that reflect the personalities of the coffee. Bernard is good, reliable and not too fruity."

North Star – winning credibility as young micro-roasters

The growth of micro-roasters has been so fast and so widespread that you can now find arguments as to whether the UK has one hundred or two hundred of them... and one of the newest is North Star, described as 'the first micro-roaster in Leeds'.

The partners, Ellis Hall and Alex Kragiopoulos, are both young – but at 19 and 23 they already have some useful experience of origin.

"Neither me as a roaster or Ellis as a barista would claim to have mastered our crafts," Alex told us frankly. "We have dedicated ourselves to an incredibly steep learning curve on the job. We have a lot to learn, but I think we have made a good start – far more experienced people than us have said our product compares well with other established roasts."

He entered coffee by accident.

"During my final year at university, my research on the slave trade in East Africa took me to Kenya and Zanzibar, and my girlfriend accompanied me as she was studying the impact of Fairtrade on coffee farming communities. So I found myself in an incredible coffee-growing region looking at the harvesting and processing of a crop I had previously never appreciated.

"I found her work far more relevant and interesting than mine! I knew from then that I wanted to try and succeed in an industry that could make a real difference to people like the farmers I had met.

"I had thought I could find a career



working for an ethically-motivated chocolate company. I quickly found that chocolate is bought as an industrialised product, and so we had little contact with the growers.

"As this was my main interest, I started to look at coffee instead, and was lucky to meet Mike Riley of Falcon, the green coffee importers. We have learnt almost everything we know from him – we have been lucky to benefit from the knowledge of the man behind some of the UK's best-selling supermarket blends, and this helped determine our own first blends.

"We knew we wanted our clients to understand that for a fairly small increase in cost, they can have something amazing from speciality and ethically-sourced coffee. We have had a great response to it."

Those who run hotels and restaurants are notoriously unwilling to change away from their existing coffee supplier. When North Star announce themselves as Leeds' first craft roaster, do they get a hearing?

"I am sure there are easier ways to start a business! Being young poses a real challenge when you have to walk into an established business and introduce yourself.

"Many of our first encounters were a bit wary about our credentials and ability, and we were far from accomplished in the art of sales.

"Another challenge we have faced is convincing people that their coffee offering could be a lot better, particularly when their business focus is more on food.

"However, what we lack in salesmanship seems to be balanced by the product we sell... honestly, the response we have had has been consistently positive."

Sampling events at the roastery are now planned to be regular monthly meetings for baristas, cafe owners and coffee enthusiasts.

"Our launch event in October saw 57 people come to the unit either in wonder at our audacity or through simple curiosity... most of them left with a clear impression that we do actually know what we are doing!"

Mushrooms in the coffee

There have been several health and wellness coffees in recent years – and the latest is Lucid Coffee, devised by Charlotte Bacon. We first came across Lottie when she was seeking to source a Colombian freeze dried coffee to use as a base, and the first samples went out to wholesalers last month.

The coffee is blended with reishi mushroom and ashwagandha, both of which are widely-used herbal medicines.

"It's a new kind of coffee-based health tonic," Lottie told us. "I had been using reishi for nearly two years myself, and had become fascinated by the healing mushrooms used in traditional medicine. I had previously been avoiding anything fermented, mouldy or 'mushroomy' as part of the anti-candida diet for several years, but found that actually some mushrooms work intelligently with the body to strengthen the whole system and improve immune function.

"Fungi play an important role here as they are the intermediate species between the plant and animal kingdoms – they work symbiotically to maintain the health of the whole organism, whether that is the forest or the human body.

"The idea for Lucid came about when I had just started to grow my own reishi mushrooms. I was invited to a rather unusual networking event where I met a guy distributing an American brand of reishi coffee – he gave me samples, but I was disappointed to see that actually it was full of artificial ingredients, sodium caseinate and glucose.

"I realised that I could make my own version, but natural organic and healthy. I developed my own blend but something was missing... I decided to try adding ashwagandha, and the taste was just right and the herbs worked well together."

Ashwagandha is, in a very loose description, a ginseng-like item, and the name means 'the smell of a horse' – however, says Lottie, her coffee gives the impression of neither horses nor mushrooms.

"It doesn't taste of mushrooms – it has a smooth and slightly malty taste! The first blend is the Illumination Mix... I find it brings about a state of calm clarity, hence the name."



Last month, we reported Cafeology's tenth birthday – one of their farmers marked it in beans, on the drying patio!

CHRISTINE COTTRELL

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There must be something which links musicians to coffee – in America, the glam-rock stars Kiss opened their own coffee-house, and the drummer from Aerosmith launched his own coffee brand. And of course in the UK, Peter Andre opened his coffee shop...

But in the north of England, a well-regarded independent band have just done the same thing – Lilliput, described as one of the North East's 'buzz bands' of 2013, have opened the Holmeside coffee shop in their home town of Sunderland. It is on the ground floor of the Independent night club and music venue, which means the band can sell tickets for the club, and act as a general meeting-place for music fans.

The idea for the venture, it has been reported, came from visiting so many top coffee shops on their travels, and being unable to find the same at home. The coffee trade was very supportive in helping them do so, band member Joe Collins told us.

"We got our training from Ouseburn Coffee – we had already decided to use their coffee. The equipment got more and more daunting as we researched machines and grinders, but we were really happy, and a bit shocked, with how many people helped us out. It's good to know the 'pretentious' stereotype is not true – most people we've spoken to have been good honest people who support us in growing the industry."

Lilliput are using Ouseburn's Foundry 2 as a house coffee.

"It's got a nice smooth full-bodied taste, but with a light citrus kick. Sunderland is quite new to independent premium coffee, and we've found this blend made a great introduction for us. Now we know the demand is there, and we've got a better idea of our clientele, we'll also serve the Foundry 1 and sell it in 250g ground or bean bags. The Sumatra Pure Lintong Toba tastes amazing and we'll be stocking that too – it's got a beautiful grapefruit-like taste, but not too overpowering."

The tea is Eteaket from Edinburgh.

"We went to a few different loose leaf tea providers and the three of us had a nice afternoon tasting them all. Eteaket stood out because of their flavour and their company values – we really liked the fact that for every new trade customer, they help to restore the sight of an elderly person in India, and we wanted to be part of that.

"We also really enjoyed the extra kick that you get from their Scottish breakfast tea. We wanted to bring loose leaf to Sunderland so others can experience the beautiful taste – now we've gone from selling out of Yorkshire tea bags to selling out of loose-leaf Eteaket, so people are making the switch."

Prices are deliberately reasonable – a flat white is £1.80.

"From the very beginning we wanted



Canny roasting in Geordieland

to be the most reasonably-priced, providing a good product at a price we felt was attractive. We're cheaper than most other places we compete with, and that's already given us a good presence. The idea is to sell more at a lower price than less at a higher price, and we're finding people do stay for another cup or try different drinks because of it.

"A lot of our customers are arts and music fans. All our music is played on vinyl, which people seem to like. It means they can flick through our collections and suggest a record, or bring some in and hear it while drinking coffee. We get an eclectic mix of people, exactly what we were after."



Not only are micro-roasters continuing to spring up all over the place, they have now become symbols of regeneration in what used to be



It's always useful to market a product with a local reference – Coffee Johnny marks a famous character... and a famous song.

industrial areas – a typical example is the Ouseburn Valley, just outside Newcastle.

This was once a site of heavy industry and coal-mining – it was derelict by the mid 20th century, and then in the last twelve years the local development trust has led the area's regeneration as a cultural hotspot. It is now a trendy hub for the arts and creative sector, and according to the local coffee roaster as quoted by the northern press, "the coolest place in Newcastle".

That roaster is the Ouseburn Coffee Company, set up by a small group of roasters and baristas. It is extremely active in local events, and serves coffee at the roastery.

"We have a small outlet at the roastery serving our coffee fresh by the bag and by the cup, but at present there is no food and limited seating, mainly outdoors, so we tend not to refer to the space as a cafe but our 'roastery shop'," partner Pete Bonnin told us. "We are working on our first fully equipped cafe/retail space but it is not ready yet. We are also very busy out on the road serving fresh coffee every weekend in Tynemouth station market as well as a variety of food and music events... we also serve a mean espresso martini!"

The roaster works in extremely small micro-lots of five kilos.

"Yes, that means the roastery is very busy! We are not yet at capacity, but already looking towards expansion but we can handle about half a tonne a week."

Among the OCC coffees is the intriguingly named Coffee Johnny blend. This was originally blended to celebrate 150 years of the Blydon Races, that famous local event and song, and is now named for the local blacksmith, horse-racing fan and bare-knuckle boxer John Oliver, who was 6ft 7ins and was given the nickname 'Coffee Johnny' for reasons unknown back in the late 1800s.

"It's a mellow Espresso with a low acidity and a full body in the cup with notes of caramel and nutty chocolate," Pete told us. "We find that those characteristics are also present in it as a drip filter, and it is our best selling coffee after our signature espresso."

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Ginger ideas for the season...



Gingerbread always appears at Christmas – Peros (top) has taken last year's trade product, George, and given him a family this year. It can be found as part of the One World range.

Meanwhile, independent cafes have put in a lot of work making their own - a whole series of trays was needed at the 108 coffee house in Truro, in preparation for the town's Christmas parade (which actually does include real reindeer).

Kokoa Collection, the maker of single-origin chocolate 'discs' for the brewing of hot chocolate, has even introduced a gingerbread-flavoured spiced sugar this year.

Beyond the Bean's easy-to-operate Christmas box

The key to making the most of your Christmas business is going to be simplicity, says Beyond the Bean. "The main thing about this is - don't over-complicate," says the brand's Gary McGann. "Making your Christmas menu too complicated could just kill your workflow at the most important time."

"Decide clearly what you're going to do, and promote it. It's very important to clear out the rubbish of everything you've been promoting recently, to get rid of all the old point-of-sale, and just concentrate totally on this one season."

This is also a good opportunity to trade up, he says.

"There's no question of that, and Starbucks have always done it well - suddenly the special latte is 40-50p extra! They have also managed to create a distinctive shift, in that we never used to think of gingerbread as something you would drink."

"So, you have two choices - some people use the 'follow Starbucks' theory, and others take the opposite view - 'we will not do what Starbucks and the copyists do'."

What Starbucks do very well, of course, is the flavoured latte. Beyond the Bean has repeated its strategy of putting a collection of the most likely flavours in a box.

"The 'Christmas box' has worked well for us - we sold hundreds of these last year.

"The reason they work is that café



operators have a lot of things to think about before Christmas, not least the staffing issues and their own families, whereas the chains have the staff and the time to think about these things and plan in advance... the major chains had their Christmas plans nailed way back in August.

"So, we think that a box of flavours, recipes and point-of-sale items means you can have the whole lot done in one go."



Do specially-blended Christmas teas sell? They do, says Marco Olmi at Drury - one caterer took a hundred cases of his Christmas tea this year.

"Properly handled, they go very well - work them on the specials board for all you're worth in December... because you aren't going to sell a lot in January!

"A very important thing is that this is a fast-throughput 'special', and should be good for an impulse retail sale as well. It has to be quick and convenient, so we find the pyramid tea-bag format works best.

"When we used flat bags for our Christmas teas, we had to use ground spices, which we didn't like. Now we have a pyramid-bagging facility, we are able to tinker a bit with better ingredients - we started with an apple-flavoured fruit tea, added our herbs and spices (cinnamon, apple, cloves, fennel seeds) for flavour, and added hibiscus and rosehip for colour.

"A pyramid bag allows the aroma to work for you - a basket of pyramids on the bar will infuse your place like a great pot-pourri. Otherwise, display it in jars, and be ready to take the lid off and invite the customer to have a sniff."



There are differing views on the ideal use of coffee at Christmas. Some roasters say that certain origins and blends are naturally right for the season - at Union Hand-Roasted, the Equinox seasonal blend is sourced directly from smallholders in El Salvador, Rwanda and Sumatra, and described as "plummy with sweet notes of Bakewell tart".

"This is a stunning new edition of Equinox," Union's Alan Miller tells us. "As espresso, the sugar coated almond notes stride to the fore with a hint of boozy red fruit; with milk you'll get the classic taste of Orio cookies. It excels as a V60 pourover, with clean, rich and sweet notes of cherry cola and dark chocolate. Use it as a seasonal special on the filter brew bar."

Other roasters prefer to devise a special Christmas blend - Cherizena does so every year, and sold three quarters of a tonne of its 2012 version. This coffee is described as "reminiscent of plum pudding", and is a Colombian coffee flavoured with rum, hazelnut, cinnamon, vanilla, orange and pecan nut.

Pumphrey's, the Newcastle roaster, has a new Festive Blend this year, which works either for catering use or retail sale. "The seasonal blend is a medium strength coffee, suitable for home brewing over the festive period. It was designed with a few key features in mind, but the main aim was to provide a tasty brew for the weary shopper, the tired parent and Father Christmas!

"It gives off a pleasing traditional coffee aroma, alongside some tasty nutty and caramel tones - it works black or with milk."

Glenfinlas of Scotland imports its products from New England Coffee in America and remarks, quite reasonably, that the Americans seem to do flavoured coffees better than anyone else.

"We believe that the best flavoured coffees come from the USA, where there is more of a heritage of producing them," Rob Menzies told us. "Our customers tell us that they can't get the same quality over here."

Glenfinlas offers the unusual Caramel Apple coffee, although the Pumpkin Spice and Blueberry Cobbler might also be attention-getting specials on a menu. The Mocha Mint takes up a familiar seasonal combination.

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It is now several years since chai first appeared on the British café menu, and astonishingly, it is also several years since the instant powdered version came to the market.

This has, certainly, proved itself as one of the most successful ways of making what is in its original form a fairly complex drink – the Indian chai wallahs generally all have their own unique family recipes, and in general, the buying of chai at an Indian roadside stall is a slightly more leisurely affair than a queue in a British coffee shop.

In this country, it is not surprising that one of the more regular quick-serve forms of chai is preferred – generally, the choice is between a pyramid tea-bag (which allows for larger pieces of tea and spices), a flavoured syrup, or a powdered 'instant' chai, which can easily be brewed in several different ways, not least of which is the relatively new chai latte.

The powdered segment has in itself grown immensely – there are now many chai powders available to the caterer. But are they any good? Can they make an 'authentic' chai drink?

Surprisingly, according to Allan Stilling of Hello Good Sip, the Anglo-Nordic beverage company, the powdered product can be both authentic and even 'artisan'.

"We make chai in a way that the others on the market cannot.

"It came from a demand from the café industry for a chai which could be produced in less than fifteen minutes. We worked on this for two years, and have the preparation down to 20-30 seconds for a chai as close as we can get to what is produced in India."

The crucial difference, says Allan Stilling, is that his powder is not bought from a contract blender – it is made in a British factory in which he has an interest.

"This is largely handmade in a very small operation. We have maybe five machines, and it looks rather like a small coffee roastery... and it's all hand-packed!

"It's not 'my' factory, but we have partnered with some guys who are Indian and who have set up in the UK... and who are now exporting back to India!

"It takes a long time, because this is the artisan way. We will never use artificials and fillers, which is a struggle when working with ten different spices, all of which have to be ground a different way.

"Yes, it is strange to hear the word 'artisan' used to refer to an 'instant' product – but we have done it."

The ingredients are sourced from several parts of the world.

"The spices come in from all over the world, which makes it very difficult to create a regular benchmark for the product – just like grapes and coffee, spices can change from one crop to the next.

The artisan of instant



"And we are not simply buying spices off a shelf – we bring these spices in. The black tea is Kenyan, the cardamom is from India, the nutmeg and cloves are from Indonesia, and the ginger is from Africa.

"We do not see such authentic ingredients in products elsewhere, so we think we have hit it spot-on.

"And there is another step after this – the next way forward is to make it all-organic, and this will involve buying direct from all the farmers... this will be a huge job."

Because of the real spices, the powder may not be entirely soluble. Some sediment may remain at the bottom of the cup – the way round this is to make a 'theatre' feature of the brewing, and maybe strain through a Hario filter coffee set-up.

What's the difference between his most recent product, Mumbai Railway Chai, and any other chai?

"This is a very clean, distinctive chai. The tastes come through clearly, not disturbed by the over-sweetness that you get from many products.

"But you do get a kick! Chai is a pick-me-up, and ours has 20 per cent black tea, against some American products which are only two or three per cent. The whole idea of chai is 'a pleasant pick-me-up', and it is much nicer to have real spices, which bloom into character, than a product filled with sugar.

"Our newest one is Shambala Raw Chai, which is a blend made to demand from some English chains, and it is how we initially wanted our chai to be – it is bold, spicy and with a notable kick of caffeine.

"It is also made without sugar. You wouldn't expect the barista to put sugar in your cappuccino before he gave it to you, and although you should have some sugar in a chai, our idea is not to have it as sugary as you get in America or India. We would rather people can add sugar to their liking, than that they are wishing they could take some out!"

The most curious of his chais is

Shambala Raw, and mix with any kind of flavoured syrup. This works well... it's not as good as changing the flavour of the chai with something like real ginger, but it does avoid holding a lot of different products."

Chai does continue to grow in the British café trade, says Allan Stilling.

"Chai-wise, the market in the UK is still small, but what has happened is that more of the market has realised that there is 'something better' in chai products... we do already sell to some chains, and we have been successful with the third-wave coffee bars of East London. It was a major aim to get the product through to these guys."

Because the original Indian product is very milky, chai lends itself to creative use with an espresso steam arm.

"If I were a café owner, I would make my chai in the same way as hot chocolate, or as a latte, because a real Indian chai is fifty-fifty milk and hot water. If you don't have an espresso machine, then of course you have to heat the milk. In summer, you can make a frappe out of them.

"If you have a customer base of the usual cappuccino/latte drinkers, then get them to try a chai latte – it keeps them on their favourite milky product. We do sampling of this to great effect in cafes, and it is sampling in London cafes which has encouraged many of them away from the sugary American products, because they know they can look the customer in the eye and tell them honestly what's in the drink!

"And they can say that it is made in the UK... in an artisan kind of way!"

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A quite remarkable response to a tip-jar theft is reported from the Nervous Dog coffee shop in Ohio. A man was pictured on CCTV quite clearly taking money from the jar and leaving quickly - however, the café management has taken the view that if the thief is desperate enough to steal tips, he is probably in very hard times. The café manager decided that in the spirit of the holiday season, they would help him out - if he comes back and apologises, they will give him a free coffee and some food to see him through Christmas. There has been some local criticism of the idea, with complaints that they are rewarding theft; the café says it is demonstrating compassion and awareness of hardship. If the thief does not come forward, the donation will go to the local food bank.



Kaldi

Two cafes in Glasgow lost charity boxes to thieves in early November: the Tiffin Cafe in Bearsden lost both a hospice appeal jar and a Poppy Appeal box, which was thought to contain £300. The café owner described the thieves as 'scum'. The charity box of Jan's Place café in Washington, County Durham, was also stolen this month.

Another warning about the secure placing of tip jars has come from Bournemouth, where the owner and a waiter from the Good Food by Alex café successfully chased and caught a thief, and have now achieved a conviction. Curiously, the same theft was attempted twice in the space of a couple of days, with the staff successfully giving chase on both occasions. Alex has now said that although the offences appear to be just petty theft, it is important for café owners to send a clear message that they will simply not put up with crime of any kind on their premises. It is essential, she says, that cafes are not seen as 'an easy target'. She told her local paper that a lot of people are reluctant to call the police over such matters, but that in her case, the police arrived within two minutes. "The message is," she said, "thieves are not going to get away with it."

In an interesting survey carried out by the PR sector, Starbucks was named as one of the three worst companies for communicating after a 'corporate crisis'. Starbucks' response to headlines about tax avoidance was judged 'poor' or 'very poor' by 50 per cent of respondents. The survey company which did the analysis remarked that its low rating was despite Starbucks' unique attempt to

repair the crisis by promising to pay £10 million in tax 'on a voluntary basis'... or, the researchers added, 'possibly because of that!'

It has been an interesting month for trademark cases in court - following our report that the tiny Apfelkind (Apple Child) café in Germany has successfully fought off an action by the giant Apple electronics organisation over the alleged similarity of their logos, it is now reported that an American court has ruled in the case brought by Starbucks against the roaster which makes the Charbucks blend. Twelve years after the case first began, a three-judge panel ruled that Starbucks had failed to prove that consumers would be confused between the two names. A major feature of Starbucks' case had been a survey it had conducted to try and show that consumers would indeed confuse the two names - the appeal court said that the survey was 'fundamentally flawed'.

After a gap of a few years, the phenomenon of exploding laundry in cafes has occurred again - and it is a freak incident which always seems to occur in Brighton. In the latest case, a café in Brighton has experienced the spontaneous combustion of tea towels. It has happened before - indeed, it happened twice in one day there in October 2012, once at Terre A Terre and once at Brighton College. Tea towels were again involved.

A regional fire commander has explained that the likely reason is a combination of cooking fats or chemicals on tea towels which have been inadequately cleaned and insufficiently aired. The accumulated residue is apparently combustible.



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