

Boughton's

COFFEE HOUSE



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

March 2014

'Competitive training' is lifting the general coffee market

The standard of coffee in the general catering sectors, outside the 'specialist' speciality coffee sector, continues to rise. As the UK barista championships, the highest coffee-skill contest in the country, begins in a few days' time, the value of other contests in the trade's mid-range has been credited with lifting the standard of speciality coffee in workplace and university catering. James Roberts of Peros, the leading distributor of Cafedirect and other Fairtrade products to foodservice, confirms that the industry can now see the clear results of what he has dubbed 'competitive training'.

The most recent special-interest barista contest has been from The University Caterers' Organisation, which last month gave its Barista Skills Challenge equal billing with its annual Chef of the Year competition, and drew over two dozen baristas from all around the country.

James Roberts was a judge at the TUCO contest and says that the event endorses the value of such contests.

"You can see the effect, in general and in individual performance – one TUCO competitor, who was extremely nervous last year, was in the top three this year. This is tangible progress.

"The university market used to be very institutionalised, and has had to compare with the commercial market very quickly to keep the contract caterers out. In general, university coffee service is now very keen and very enthusiastic."

Meanwhile, the contract catering

world, which has had a lot to say in recent years about its progress with coffee quality in education sites and the workplace, has been surprised by some research in which United Coffee suggests that 'contract caterers are losing up to a staggering 31 per cent of total sales to the high street'.

The reason for the caterers' surprise is that this matter has been discussed for well over a decade, and it was back in 2008 that 57 per cent of catering managers in workplaces and educational sites all agreed that the improved quality of 'real' coffee had helped prevent absenteeism of staff and students in unauthorised coffee runs to the high street shops.

However, United's new survey suggests that even after all this talk, the question of the right coffee offer in the workplace remains unresolved. The caterers are not convinced, and again cite competitions as a useful factor.

Probably the contract caterer most active in coffee over recent years has been Baxter Storey, whose training manager Tim Sturk credits its involvement in barista contests as a major factor in its improved coffee quality (it

has a staff barista in the finals again this year).

"We have worked hard over the past few years to change the catering coffee culture – competition has helped us raise our standards, and our coffee sales and growth are the proof."

Justin Slawson, managing director at Ferns Coffee, was another judge at TUCO and said that he has found the rising standard of workplace and education coffee to be 'surprising and uplifting'. Barista contests, he believes, played a major part in this.

"Whether competition is national or in-house, it demonstrates that there are benchmarks we can set ourselves against. In-house contests show that there are standards the entire trade can aim at, instead of all the attention being concentrated on just one stratospherically-brilliant national barista champion."

The TUCO barista championship was won by Bill Francis of the University of Bristol; he is a colleague of last year's winner. Kian Shakouri from the University of Warwick was second place, and third was Matthew Burridge from the University of Exeter.

Is Starbucks still only on the way up?

Starbucks has made the quite astonishing suggestion that it is still in the early stages of its growth as a company.

Chief executive Howard Schultz has told a shareholders' meeting that 'if Starbucks were a 20-chapter book, the company is still only in chapter four or five'.

At the same time, he said that Starbucks is sourcing higher quality coffee than at any other time in its history, not least because of the acquisition of a 240-hectare coffee farm in Costa Rica. He also promised small-batch coffee which will be 'special, exotic, the like of which the marketplace hasn't seen before... we're going to have coffee that is second to none'.

Meanwhile, Starbucks is attempting to dominate the American tea shop market. Having bought the Teavana brand, it has now partnered with American TV personality Oprah Winfrey to create the Oprah Chai.

In the UK, Starbucks has confirmed to us that it intends to turn half its British stores into franchises, and that new openings will be handled by franchise partners. Starbucks is also now aiming for a target of two hundred drive-through sites.

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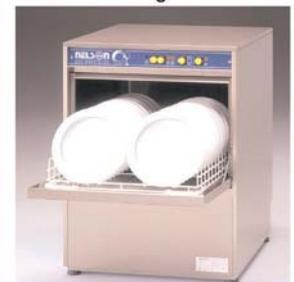
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Fracino, the Birmingham-based maker of espresso machines, has said that a move to producing its own copper boilers now increases the share of in-house components in its machines to 90 per cent. Managing director Adrian Maxwell (above) said that doing so involved a £300k investment.

NELSON
Heavy-duty crockery, glass and dishwashing machines



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A Harrogate cafe has run an interesting project in support of a local coffee company - the Rasmus café devoted a week to serving Source Climate Change coffee, which is marketed locally by Cristina Talens. The coffee brand was created after the founder, a former ethical trading officer who has worked at origin, and who realised the impact of climate change while at coffee farms in Peru. She devised the idea of creating a gourmet coffee that would incentivise small farmers to protect primary forests and to plant new trees. Her coffee was served at the Eye on Earth Summit in Abu Dhabi in 2011, and at the Rio +20 Climate Change event. An ambitious plan from the brand is to save an area of the South American rainforest equivalent to the size of the Yorkshire Dales.

United Coffee is changing its name. It will now become UCC Coffee, taking on the corporate name of the Japanese owner, who bought the business two years ago.

Rather unusually, a contract caterer is to operate a high street coffee shop. Elixir is to open up Coffee Connection in Wakefield as a project for a local housing association which has 60,000 tenants in the area.

Another company has popped up with a wi-fi 'solution' for cafes. The Wify in a Box system is intended to offer a 'safe and secure social wi-fi' which a café operator simply buys and plugs in to their internet connection; customers do not need a password, but guests log on using their

Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn account or email address. The price appears to be £900.

A town councillor who already runs a coffee shop in Henley has now opened a tea room as well. Lorraine Hillier, who owns the Hot Gossip coffee house, has now opened Upstairs and Downstairs in a former art gallery. She has asked local actor Simon Williams, who starred in Upstairs, Downstairs on TV, to cut the ribbon at an opening ceremony.

In the same town, Café Copia is to open up as the town's eleventh coffee shop. The business is owned by Philip Grobien, who already has a branch in nearby Marlow.

Boston Tea Party will open its 15th site at The School Yard in Harborne in late June. The School Yard is a development from a Victorian school building, now re-designed as 'a new destination to eat, live, learn and meet' with some apartment flats also included. Urban Coffee already has a site there.

Britain has recently experienced an increase of 27 per cent in independent food merchants, according to a survey by an insurance broker. There has been a 31 per cent rise in bakeries and a 10 per cent increase in wine merchants: curiously, coffee houses were not mentioned.

Percol is the coffee brand behind a charity project by TV personality Peter Andre, whose new instant coffee raises money for Cancer Research UK.



Hot chocolate heads for the mainstream

A large trade supplier remarked recently that hot chocolate has been added to the Office for National Statistics' 'basket of goods and services', which is used as a guideline to consumer prices in general – this, it was argued, shows that the drink has become mainstream, and two hot chocolate promotions have been devised.

In a rather imaginative move, Paul Eagles of Kokoa Collection, the company which supplies single-origin chocolate disks which melt in steamed milk or coffee, has created his own Hot Chocolate Festival, to run from 24th March to 6th April.

The first 'festival' involves only cafes and hotels using Kokoa Collection products, but he has achieved a list of a hundred venues from Edinburgh to the Isle of Wight which will be involved, many of them devising their own hot chocolate drinks for promotional use. The overall aim is to advise the public of the difference between 'real' chocolate drinks and the mass-market instant alternative.

The project also has a charitable aim, raising funds for a cause in Haiti, from where Paul sources some of his most recent single-origin chocolate.

The picture above, by one participating cafe, shows a Chocolate Dessert Trio, by Cotswold Artisan Coffee of Cirencester. All are served in 4.5oz glasses. On the left is a white choco-

late and raspberry cheesecake (home-made raspberry coulis in the base with white and vanilla chocolate and topped with fresh whipped cream, then dressed with a little more coulis and digestive crumb). In the centre is the Hot Chocolate Affogato, which is Madagascan vanilla ice cream served with a Haiti chocolate shot to be poured over, and decorated with fresh mint. On the right is a chocolate hazelnut espresso, made with hazelnut syrup, double ristretto and Madagascan 82 per cent chocolate topped with ground hazelnuts.

Elsewhere, Marimba has a new Mug Shot contest - this brand supplies its 'chocolate melt' in flake format, and consumers have to send in a picture of themselves drinking the product. Those who mention the venue that served them the drink have the chance of winning chocolate hampers worth over £50. There will be prizes for the outlets who serve the winning customers.

Harris & Hoole expands, while Caffè Nero opens up in America

The Harris and Hoole chain is to expand further. Nick Tolley has confirmed a press report of his expansion plans, which rather vaguely suggested the addition of several hundred new staff. He told us: "we reckon we might be hiring around 500 new people this year. The number is dependent on the sites we find, which itself is opportunity-led, so the reports are a little speculative... but I hope we're able to open the same number of shops this year as we did last year, about 30."

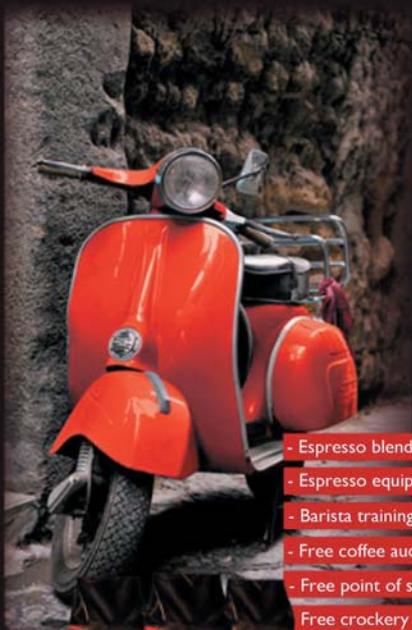
Meanwhile, we noted some months back that a report in the American press, suggesting that Caffè Nero was about to open there, had come as a surprise on both sides of the Atlantic... it appears that a rather enthusiastic property agent spoke out earlier than he was supposed to. The chain has now confirmed that it will open in Boston in late April.

Founder Gerry Ford, who used to live in Boston, observes that the relative European-ness of the place lends itself to his desire to 'slowly enter' the American market. He will put Nero in one of America's most-concentrated coffee shop districts – there are 489 coffee shops there, roughly one for each 9,500 residents. A curiosity of the news was the suggestion that the American site would use the same coffee as in Nero's British stores - when we queried this, the chain confirmed that it will indeed be exporting coffee roasted from its site in west London: "all Nero sites round the world use coffee roasted in Battersea".

Situation vacant

A salesperson with some foodservice background is required to sell Alma de Cuba, the new gourmet Cuban coffee brand, into the foodservice industry and to top-end hotels, restaurants and retailers. The operator, Phillip Oppenheim, offers 'a basic salary plus generous commission'. Apply to: phillip@almacuba.com

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Sweetbird, the character brand devised by Beyond the Bean, has extended into still lemonades. The range proposes 'a twist on the lemon classic', featuring blueberry and mint, and watermelon & rosemary, with a conventional cloudy lemonade as well. The products are all British-made and, as familiar with this supplier, are vegetarian/vegan approved.

TV police target cafe laptops

An odd situation has been highlighted by Andrew Moyes, managing director of BB's Coffee and Muffins, who has shown us a demand from the TV licensing people, who appear to be doing a fundraising project targetted at coffee houses.

Essentially, the TV people say that televisions in café premises need to be licensed... but deep in their demand comes the interesting additional information that even if you do not have a television on the premises, but your customers bring in their own laptop or mobile device and use it through your wi-fi to watch live television (not recorded), and if you are generous enough to allow them to plug into your mains supply... then you are liable for a TV licence. If they use their own batteries, you are not.

"People are certainly using tablets to watch live football matches in cafes, so this could become an issue," remarks Andrew. "Have any other coffee shops had this problem?"

In what seems a quite logical consequence in areas where public facilities are closing, a village post office has reopened - in a cafe. The Corby Glen sub-branch has moved to The Pantry in Market Place, owned by Miranda Bainbridge, who recently returned to Lincolnshire two years ago after living in Spain for 20 years. She told the local paper: "when I came back to the UK I could see communities were dying. Many post offices have closed in villages and I didn't want that to happen here."



Many of our readers know of the shelter for the homeless co-founded by Louie Salvoni of Espresso Service. He has now created the Our House support service, which will among other things seek to assist offenders into rehabilitation through jobs in cafes - one major chain is already involved.

Cat coffee quality – surprise result from independent taste tests

The never-ending saga of kopi luwak coffee, the product in which coffee cherries are digested by Indonesian civet cats and the resulting excreted beans are brewed into a beverage, has taken two more quite unexpected twists. A query over the possible 'ethical certification' of the coffee has thrown up an entirely new certification problem, and an independent evaluation of brewed kopi luwak has produced a very positive result from both professional and amateur tasters, the opposite of what was expected.

We recently reported that the author Tony Wild, who claims to have discovered the original kopi luwak coffee and now leads campaigns against the unethical factory-farming production of it, had launched another petition suggesting that the coffee could conceivably qualify for Rainforest Alliance certification.

This bizarre state of affairs is said to arise from a change in the Code of the Sustainable Agriculture Network, which the Alliance follows. That Code has hitherto forbidden certification to farmers who keep caged animals - but a simplification of the rules might now conceivably result in factory-farming becoming 'ethically certified'.

This has been followed by another report which suggests that Rainforest Alliance standards in general may now be in question, because the new simplified certification standards have been set too low 'to guarantee the biodiversity and shade coverage that translate to sustainably-produced quality shade-grown coffee'.

It is suggested that the new 'canopy density' and 'tree cover' requirements have been reduced so drastically that 'they do not fit the image of what the average consumer would expect of a Rainforest Alliance coffee'.

Meanwhile on the kopi luwak subject, a 'taste test' project has been run in America, to establish whether this exceptionally high-priced coffee matches what is expected of Indonesian coffees in general.

Jack Groot, who is both a coffee-



A civet cat with its farmer

house operator in Michigan and a trade consultant, recently protested that civet cat coffee selling at \$600 per pound cannot really taste five hundred dollars better than conventionally good Indonesian coffee.

He suggested a comparative blind tasting, and to his surprise, he was contacted by a producer in Jakarta, who offered to send him samples of two different wild-collected Kopi samples... which, on the US market, might have fetched a thousand dollars.

A team of cuppers and roasters were then presented with six coffees. Two were the kopi luwaks, three were conventional Sumatrans, and the sixth, in Jack's words, was another Sumatran but 'a crap coffee grabbed from a poor drying area'.

The challenge was to find out whether the high-priced kopi luwaks outranked other Sumatrans in terms of taste, in the opinion of professional cuppers... and they did. One came top, and the other third.

However, Jack Groot still remained

unconvinced, even when the supplier asked him to repeat the test with his 'regular American customers'... of whom, nine out of eleven said they preferred the luwak.

"I believe I have been proved right," he told us. "There was no difference that made the cuppers fall off their chairs and ask if I would I take their American Express card for more of this amazing coffee.

"The 'regular customers' preferred it because it was 'less bitter, and not as complex' as other coffees. But, when I asked them if they would pay \$600 for a pound of it, none handed me the cash.

"So I still say that kopi luwak is all marketing, because we found no quality difference to suggest that it deserves the exorbitant prices charged."

Solaris Botanicals, the organic and herbal tea supplier from Galway, has won the 'Best Start Up Business' award at Ireland's National Enterprise Awards. What puzzled us, although the organisers seem to have missed this little detail, is that Solaris was founded by Joerg Muller and Karen Wieland in 2008. How, we asked, did it win a 2014 start-up prize? "I had the same question," Joerg responded cheerfully. "They had asked us to include our innovative product developments, and there was an innovation award as well - so I think that in the ceremony, they mixed up the envelopes!"

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It is reported from Scotland that a million-pound investment will go into an artisan coffee shop and restaurant at Glasgow Central station. The Glendola group, which runs hotels and bars, intends to open a roaster-retailer called Gordon Street Coffee.

The Madre Tierra coffee shop at Walthamstow rail station appears to have been saved following the intervention of the local MP, Stella Creasy. The operator was told he would have to move out to allow for station redevelopment, but a customer began a petition which raised 550 signatures, and the council leader is organising talks aimed at finding an amicable agreement between the operator, the rail authorities, and the developer.

Masteroast, the large contract coffee roaster, has created the Peterborough 900 Fairtrade blend, which supports the city cathedral's fund-raising appeal. It will help raise awareness of the campaign to build a heritage centre in the cathedral grounds and a community music school.

Costa Coffee has opened its fourth Scottish drive-through outlet, at the Port Glasgow retail park.

Leila Colvin, the daughter of news-reader Jon Snow is the new owner of the High Tea Of Highgate tea shop in London.

Caffe & Cream, Billericay, was forced to close for several days after burglars caused £35,000 of damage

- intruders forced the back door and disconnected the espresso machine, which was connected to the mains water supply at the time, flooding the shop. They then vandalised an ice cream machine, crockery on a glass shelf, and a grinder. Police have said that there was a recent attempt to break into a nearby Costa, and that hired vans from the same rental company were seen near both incidents.

Picnic Cornwall, a coffee house still under a year old, has won the Best South West Café, from the region's Food magazine. The award was sponsored by Havana Coffee of Barnstaple. The contest was decided by public vote.

The operator of a new mobile coffee business in Devon has a showbiz background – Ivan's Coffee is run by Ivan Bunyard, who has been a drummer with Mumford and Sons, has toured the world with them and performed at the Glastonbury festival twice. He works from the back of a 1962 Volkswagen camper van, using coffee from the Crediton Coffee Co.

An application by Caffé Nero to open in St Albans' Market Place has drawn a complaint that the town has reached its limit of coffee shops. St Albans Civic Society said: "we have nothing against Caffé Nero but we just think we have reached a saturation point."

Breakfast market - plan it carefully

In what might be considered a rather obvious statement, a speaker at the recent Casual Dining show told his audience that coffee is 'absolutely key' to capturing the breakfast market.

Peter Martin, of the research company CGA Peach, told a seminar audience at the show that six per cent of the UK population have used McDonald's for breakfast in the past six months, perhaps three million consumers.

This was followed in the breakfast market by Costa, Greggs, Starbucks and JD Wetherspoon; that, he said, showed how massive investment in coffee by the two non-specialists, McDonald's and Wetherspoon, was paying off.

It was key, he added, to make sure that staff have 'their early-morning heads on' when working the breakfast market - any operator who is not completely focussed on what the consumer really needs at that time of day, will fail.

Revolver's co-operative coffee looks for growth

Revolver Coffee of Wolverhampton, one of the suppliers currently enthusiastic about coffee from Cuba, expects the number of stores it supplies with speciality coffee to grow this year – its Revolver World coffee is currently sold at 200 co-operative food shops, and director Paul Birch is looking at reaching 250 in the next few months.

Revolver is itself a co-operative business, and as Paul Birch explained in this magazine some months ago, the co-operative retail movement is bigger than many people realise. While the media has reported the problems of the biggest name in the sector, Britain's regional co-ops are growing – between 2008 and 2012, the number of co-operatives rose 28 per cent to 6,169. As Birch has remarked: "most people don't know this – they think it's all 'the Co-op'."

Paul Birch is the man who runs the Revolver Records music label, most notable for having signed the Stone Roses. He works with coffee producers in Colombia, Ethiopia, and Costa Rica, and a quarter of profits is re-invested in health and education projects in the producing communities. The next Revolver development is a range of beers from Cuba, followed by 'other interesting beers from developing countries'.

The dog-friendly Beach Cafe at Wells-next-the-Sea, which is run by the Holkham Hall estate, has reached one thousand members to its K-9 Club.

The venue will be developing its dog-friendly facilities at Easter. Meanwhile, and not geographically far away from there, the Woof and Brew company has extended its range of dog-friendly teas.

"Our teas are in pyramid tea bags and brewed in 250ml of boiling water and then 750ml of cold water is added, effectively making an iced tea which can then be given to the dog," the company tells us. "The teas are all human grade, but they are specifically blended for dogs (with the help of our vet). We have tried all of the teas ourselves and some taste quite good, whilst others are definitely an acquired taste for humans!"

The Woof and Brew team also runs www.dogfriendly.co.uk, which lists dog-friendly venues around the UK including cafes. "We have an Apple app and an Android app which have been downloaded more than 40,000 times. Dog-friendly cafes are invited to register themselves.

Coffee doughnut - two guilts in one!

An interesting coffee-based cooking challenge has been held in north Carolina.

The contest at a local university is sponsored by S&D, a custom coffee roaster, and entrants are challenged to create a doughnut, an iced blended beverage, or a 'chef's choice', with the condition that some of S&D's coffee or tea had to be used.

Some contestants used tea to create salmon entrées and sweet tea meatballs, and others used coffee to make such desserts as macaroons, beignets and frappes.

The winner was a tiramisu doughnut, filled with mascarpone and heavy cream, containing four tablespoons of coffee extract and topped with a Kahlua-based glaze.

The roaster made the interesting comment that the contest effectively markets the coffee trade to the chefs of the future, who with luck will not forget the subtleties of the product.

More entertainingly, the sponsor praised the winning entry for 'achieving two desserts for one guilt trip'.

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It is perhaps not in the least surprising that more companies are entering the capsule sector – and more well-known names are doing so, too. The latest to do so is Mokarabia, where commercial director Sunit Mehta tells us that his new project involves three distinct machines, one for relatively low use, one for 50-60 coffees a day, and one for over a hundred a day. Three familiar machine brands are involved – de Longhi, Rancilio, and La Cimbali.

"It is a Mokarabia capsule," he tells us. "It looks nothing like the Nespresso, and we will be the only company with a menu of both six or seven coffee blends... and then a selection of teas."

For the commercial market, how does an operator reach the decision over whether to create a Nespresso-compatible capsule, or to devise their own system? There are many who say that the capsule market must, sooner or later, come together into a kind of general compatibility, and that one format will become the standard.

If this is so, why choose to have your own capsule, and why not simply have a Nespresso-compatible?

"Nespresso, while very important, is only one of the available systems," argues Mokarabia. "Lavazza's, to mention just one of the historically most important, have been around for a lot of years. So I would not speak of any one 'standard' system."

"It is also legally and commercially possible to launch a system compatible with Nespresso, but you have to be aware of the issues – Nespresso is trying to launch new machines where the compatible capsules will not work, so I would not expect that compatible capsules will be useful forever with Nespresso machines."

"Launching a compatible system is just a 'me too' product – it can be OK, but it will never be the original."

"There is a lot of space for original and qualitatively excellent products, so Mokarabia has launched its own capsule systems for both domestic use and catering businesses."

How important is the capsule format in foodservice? In one of our recent reports, Lavazza remarked: 'for hotels and restaurants, the capsule is now a no-brainer', but to what degree have capsules already entered the restaurant, bar and hotel world, and will they continue doing so?

"This market for capsules is very important and only partially exploited."

"The issues were the lack of machines powerful enough to be used in a professional environment, and cost-efficiency. Today, our Sintesi (produced by Gruppo Cimbali) is the best existing answer for this market."

"The machine is very powerful and has a reasonable cost, and these are the aspects which will make it a real 'blockbuster' in this market. The potential here is remarkable."

Capsules - moving more into foodservice?



A typical Crem adaptation of shower head and filter basket to accept capsules

Unusually, Mokarabia will offer teas in capsules – this is an idea which has been tested elsewhere without really taking off.

"The issue with Nespresso's tea was due to the type of capsule they were using. With the Mokarabia-Cimbali machine, the quality of teas and herbal teas is remarkable because of the possibility of tuning the machine for the appropriate quantity of hot water to produce an optimal tea."



The Mokarabia machine by Cimbali

At Crem International, David Russell says that the conversion of machines to various capsule formats is an expertise which has begun to be well learned, and says that while capsules first took off in the home, it is the foodservice and catering markets which are now growing.

"For many years now, we have converted traditional espresso machines for use with various capsules, by means of a simple removal of the shower plate and an addition of a diffuser with spike to pierce the capsule, then using a capsule group handle instead of a filter basket."

"This is a very simple change, the cost of the parts to perform the conversion are relatively inexpensive, and this still gives the image and impression of a 'real' coffee machine."

"We have seen a move more towards capsule-specific machines over the last few years, with a fully auto-eject group system where a capsule is placed directly into the machine and expels directly to waste after use. This still has the look and feel of a traditional machine, but the convenience and ease of a capsule machine – so for pubs and hotel bars it is definitely a no-brainer."

Although there is an argument that the capsule market must become gen-

erally compatible, some machine makers are not committing themselves, but adapting machines to suit various capsule formats.

"We decide what formats to make, based on what our customers demand – luckily there are actually only very few formats on the market."

"I believe most of the large roasters will make a generic capsule for use in as many different machine types as possible, mainly to capture a share of the buoyant domestic market (the Nespresso format), with some looking to build specific machines for their own capsule. We are already in development on capsule-specific machines for three large roasters..."

but all of them are utilising readily-available capsule formats."

The capsule concept is growing in foodservice, confirms Russell.

"It is rapidly expanding. We can see those roasters and distributors who have always been traditionally anti-capsule, now ordering machines for use with capsules, and the large European roasters are actively seeking out distribution partners based in the UK for their capsule."

"Capsules are also expanding into the office market – we are releasing a one-touch capsule machine with the ability to use real milk, so giving cappuccino and latte at the touch of a button, as in a bean-to-cup. This is a big step forward for capsule machines, as previously they didn't have the guts to produce steam for milk-based drinks."

"We have taken pre-orders for 200 machines in the UK alone."

"As for coffee shops – who will make the first leap of faith in the UK? We have two global high street players already trialling three-group auto-ejects in capsule-only stores, with very positive feedback... where will this lead?"

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There is creativity in the sponge cake sector, and some of the newest ideas for the trade have come from a small but fashionable market town in East Anglia.

The simply-entitled Sponge company of Holt has drawn attention to itself twice with recent developments - it has created the 'baby sponge', and it has introduced the mixed-format sponge, in which a conventional-sized round cake can feature eight different flavours, creams, and toppings. It is a cake which is, strictly speaking, impossible to bake.

The owner of Sponge is a café operator as well - he has the Byfords 'tea shop and posh B&B' in the same market town, in the very premises in which Sue Barron first began creating her sponge cakes for sale at local markets.

The company has since taken off like a rocket in online sales, offering the opportunity for consumers to order one sponge, to customise one cake, or even order one slice packed as a birthday card. It has also attracted the attention of very big companies such as airlines, but the attitude of 'attention to detail with each single order' means that Sponge still partners closely with small cafes, says head of sales Richard Fowler.

"We really are set up for both big and small trade customers. One call may be from British Airways, and the next from Jean in the café who gets through two cakes a week... and they both have to get the same service, because without that, we're finished.

"Attention to detail is what our boss calls the 'give to get' principle... the more you are willing to give in your attitude, the more business you'll get. Sometimes we also call it the Mafia Principle - we have to be the offer that they don't want to refuse!

"Our trade business all started with independent cafes. My own first sale was at a little walk-in café in Brighton, where I arrived unannounced with a couple of samples, and invited the owner to try them. We have now actually invested in servicing this kind of customer."

That is not a loose bit of marketing-speak, he stresses.

"In cases where we have to work through distributors, it is possible to lose control of knowing who you're going to. So we had a new idea, and we said to our distributor: 'we will invest in the cost of one of your staff working one day a week entirely on maintaining and servicing Sponge customers. You have to send that member of staff here to the bakery, we put them up in the 'posh B&B' at the café, and we will make sure they get what Sponge is all about'.

"This came as a surprise to some in the distribution side, but it shows the level of our interest in our customers."

Interest in customers produces benefits, he notes. A high number of individual one-cake or two-cake orders

The creative sponge



The impossible multi-sponge (left) and the individual 80gm baby sponge

A trade supplier which concentrates entirely on the sponge cake argues that sellable new ideas continue to appear

tends to produce a very large number of customer comments.

"Feedback from outside is a great thing. The problem with company planning meetings is that they are always an inner circle - it's the feedback from outside which can be valuable.

"It's a lot of effort to service individual orders, but in return we very often get views which makes us ask 'why did we not think of that?' You come across gems of ideas, and you get to hear of trends - if more than one customer starts feeding something back, you think: 'are we on to something?'

"The problem about listening to feedback from outside is that it can be a big client who says: 'why don't you...!', and you have to be very careful about whether something which is convenient for them is something that will be good for you. I can tell you that saying 'no' to a potential order of 15,000 cakes a month makes for a very painful e-mail to write... but you have to make the right decision for your own company."

This is where growth for its own sake can be wrong, says Richard Fowler.

"Our founder says to remember that the people who started the big cake brands in the supermarkets probably started out by thinking the same way as us... but they got too big, and lost their way."

The Sponge company prepares its cakes in small batches, maybe a dozen at a time, with a system of fairly constant baking throughout the day in rotary ovens for even sharing of the heat; the resulting cakes are all, without exception, hand-finished.

"We have never felt the need to shout about it, but these cakes are handmade - 'artisan' has become an over-used word, but it applies."

To what degree does a café customer recognise an 'artisan' sponge

from an industrial one?

"The consumer knows, absolutely, the quality of a sponge as soon as they look at it. It would be a dis-service to the public, and a big mistake, to fail to recognise this!

"The sponge remains important to a menu, and the sponge cake always has a great aesthetic appeal."

And there is vast room for innovation, he adds.

"Many cafes like to make their own Victoria or chocolate sponges, but will still come to us for the 'something special'.



"The great thing about sponge is that there is an infinite number of things to try out..."

- Richard Fowler

"The great thing about sponge is that, rather like sandwiches, there is an infinite number of things you can try out. We have been trying out a Father's Day chocolate and ale sponge - we literally poured the ale into both the cake mix and the buttercream.

"The new more-ish idea is the Spuffle, the sponge truffle, which came about after thinking about hybrids like the cronut. It is a chocolate sponge rolled in apricot jam - it's more sticky than you expect from a

traditional sponge."

The real attention-getter has been the invention of the baby sponge, a miniature cake complete with top and bottom layers, filling and topping.

"This, for us, has been both a head-turner and a door-opener.

"It was developed for the online gift business. We wanted something with the 'cute' factor, and when we began showing them at country shows, a lot of traders decided they wanted to stock them - including Selfridges!

"It looks smaller than it is. It's an 80gm sponge, which is bigger than a lot of the individual cakes you see on sale, at 40-50gm.

"The big issue is in being able to provide it at a price which allows the trade to make a margin. They are very time-consuming to make, because they are individually baked, and each is topped in its own way - these are not cut-outs from a bigger size. It is also slightly over-packaged for a grab-and-go item.

"We're refining all this, but at the moment we've seen it sold between £1.50 and £3.95."

There is another, possibly unique idea - the sharing sponge. This combines slices of four or eight flavours divided into perhaps 16 portions, in one circular cake... which is technically impossible.

"We've never seen anyone else try anything like this. We devised it for online business, and not as something generally available to the trade... except that the Bluebell Line preserved railway in Sussex like to use it.

"It is actually made up of slices of eight different cakes, all put together manually... there would be no other way of doing it!"

Another new idea has come with the issue of pre-portioning, in which cakes are divided into equal servings.

"Most of our cakes are sold pre-portioned, because trade customers like this, as it overcomes one of the difficulties of getting different staff to serve the same size.

"Wastage is the huge problem of the cake business. We have now stopped one reason for this by devising 'bookends', which are little L-shaped clear plastic things. As soon as you take one slice from a cake, the next slice becomes the most susceptible to drying out... and of course, every slice taken out makes the next slice more likely to fall over, which doesn't look good in front of the customer.

"So, you slide this little thing under the cake, which stops the cake falling, and can add a couple of days to the shelf life - we have been told by some trade customers that this has saved them from throwing the last slices out."

A new major feature of sponge - colour!

How important is the sponge cake to a café business? And how much do café owners want their suppliers to be 'creative' with sponge ideas?

"Sponge is fundamental - it is the essence of 'cake', despite the fact that cakes can take other forms," remarks Simon Law of the Handmade Cake Company.

"Colour is becoming really important in cake, including sponges. We have recently made a cake for a client that has three layers, all of which are different colours, and it looks absolutely stunning! We make cake sponges in a number of shapes and sizes, but the most popular is still our good old round cake, despite it being a seriously large piece of cake."

The Handmade company's cakes feature several interesting descriptions, such as 'a light Victoria Sponge'... are all sponges not supposed to be light?

"No, they are not! The Victoria Sponge should be, but not all of them are. We also make a Continental Chocolate one that is stuffed full of great chocolate, and has the consistency of a bar of chocolate. This is not light... but seriously good!"

Handmade also tends to refer to the qualities of jams and lemon curd - what is the difference, in a catering cake, between a 'good' and an 'ordinary' jam?

"Lemon curd was historically a vivid yellow - remember Gales? Well, today vivid yellow shouts: 'artificial colours!', which is a no-no, so we sourced a curd that is entirely natural colours. The same applies to the lime curd in our new zucchini and lime cake. Additionally, our curd is now made with free-range eggs, and more recently contains only sustainable palm, which is another food issue gaining traction."

In general practical terms, what is the right portion of a cake to serve beside a tea or coffee? "All our cakes are available pre-cut, due to the need to ensure all consumers get the same size portion. Only a small number of customers demand uncut cakes these days, possibly because they do look more 'homemade'."

"We can cut different portion sizes, but typically our round cakes are 100gm portions (a fourteenth of the cake) and our traybakes are 80-85gm. Occasionally someone wants to make a real statement, so wants a triple layer or one cut in twelfths, in which case the portion sizes are 120gm or more."

"We always say, if you are going to sell an indulgent moment - make sure it is a great quality indulgence!"

The cakes that build a café's reputation

The cake is an essential part of the business plan of a café, and it is a product which deserves to be taken more seriously than it is by some caterers.

Ria Chambers, who owns and runs Ria's Rosy Lee tea room in Wellingborough, Northants, is an enthusiast about the value of cakes to a café business. She believes in 'the experience of taking tea', with a selection of fine teas and homemade cakes all served on a proper china tea service.

She is also an enthusiast on the principle of matching teas and cakes, and of the strategy of a 'flavour of the month'. She really will say: 'this tea goes well with that cake' - do customers respond to this?

"Yes, I let Irvin's, my tea and coffee supplier, know of the theme and flavours of the month, and they advise on something which will complement - that then becomes the 'tea and coffee of the month', which will then naturally go together with the cakes."

"Most customers order their drinks first, then decide on cake, and if they can't decide I will point out what would work well with their drink selection. They are generally happy to follow this."

Ria is a creative baker, all her cakes and biscuits are homemade, her menu changes weekly to reflect the seasons and events, and is one of the few cafes around to have a unique 'house cake'. How 'creative' do customers want her to be?

"A victoria sponge is always popular, and sponge cakes tend to be the ones to sell first. I do play around with the basis of the sponge so there is variety, and the variations are just as popular - recently I have had coffee and walnut sponge and a violet sponge, and both sold out in record time."

"A light tea such as Darjeeling or Earl Grey goes well with sponge, and orange blossom oolong worked well with the floral taste of violet. Of course, the coffee and walnut cake complemented coffee, but it was a medium strength such as Colombian, so the coffee and cake don't overpower each other."

In practical terms, what is the right portion of a cake to serve beside a tea or coffee? On the one hand, you have to exercise some kind of portion control for business reasons, but on the other hand, you don't want to appear a cheapskate!

"I often tend to cut cakes as I would have them at home!" says Ria cheerfully. "I don't think about profit margins when serving cake - I think about



Ria's unique rose cake

making sure someone knows they have had a piece a cake.

"I've seen the recommended portion sizes of some wholesale cakes, and I think they are insulting to the customer. Also, you need to think whether a heavy, dense cake should be cut smaller than a light cake like a sponge, or the customer might not eat it all, which would be a waste."

"But sometimes it's good to put it down to the customer, as they will often ask how they want a slice to be cut."

The unique cake is the Ria's Roses. It has a distinctive petal-like shape.

"I devised it when I realised that rose was becoming the theme of the tearoom, and that I needed a signature bake."

"I wanted a delicate flavoured cake without being overpowering, so I started out with a sponge base and experimented. People think it is novel to have a rose-shaped, rose-flavoured cake, and many say it is like Turkish Delight. I am becoming known for it - new customers come in because they have been told about it."



Ria Chambers

"The cake is designed to go with the house tea, a medium China black tea with a smoky taste which mellows into a rose aftertaste. The two together bring out the rose in each other."

Other curiosities on her menu are crumpet bread, seed cake, Anzac biscuits and cattern.

"Crumpet bread comes as a thick sliced loaf, with the large-hole texture of crumpets, but unlike normal crumpets it remains soft rather than going hard and rubbery. It is toasted."

"Most places have a version of seed cake, but in Northants caraway

seed is always added as it used to be grown widely in the area."

What is the secret to a good Anzac biscuit, the really famous Australian treat? Ria's is made to her great-great-grandmother's recipe.

"In my family we have always made them more in the shape and thickness of a flapjack rather than a biscuit, as if they are spread too thin they can dry out and break easily. A good flavour and moistness is key. This will be my first year open for Anzac Day but I am planning to have them on the menu, and a Honey Farm Mysore coffee goes well with this - its natural malty sweetness complements the biscuit."

"A cattern was something made locally by lacemakers to celebrate St Catherine's Day - it is somewhere between a cake and biscuit, and the nearer to the Rutland/Leicester borders you get, the more cakey it gets. It is best described as a chewy cinnamon cookie for modern tastes, and cinnamon coffee really enhances it."

"This was inspired by the BBC's The Paradise. They would often refer to new cinnamon coffee that had been brought in from abroad during the character's travels. As this intrigued me, I asked Irvin's about it, and they explained at the turn of the century cinnamon was blended and ground into the coffee to add flavour and sweetness as sugar was too expensive."

"They have replicated this method, so this coffee is as it would have been at the turn of the century, rather than just adding a shot of cinnamon syrup as most places do now."

A very unusual feature of the Rosy Lee is the sign saying 'we've signed the pledge - Better Children's Menus'.

This turns out to be a campaign started by a doctor who is a mother of two, and who argues that while adult meals have become better, the average children's menu is still stuck in the 80s, and features fatty, additive-filled, salt-covered chips, beans, pizza and fish fingers. The doctor argues that healthy but appealing children's food is a selling point for a café or restaurant.

"Better Children's Menus was set up by a paediatric doctor just within the past year," confirms Ria Chambers. "It is a pledge to ensure food is with no additives or preservatives, that smaller portions are offered, and that a venue can accommodate allergies and dietary needs. It is still growing as establishments have to ensure they can meet these requirements - maybe that accounts for not many numbers yet."

It has been quite a time for anniversaries in the coffee trade – several companies have reached their tenth birthdays, one has notched up its fiftieth... and the roaster Lincoln and York, which provides the beans for a great number of coffee houses and caterers while staying virtually anonymous in the shadows of the trade, is now celebrating its twentieth.

We could not resist teasing director James Sweeting about this, because we have also observed a report of the company beginning to roast in 1992. Either someone's arithmetic is out, we said, or you're older than you look...

"Technically, both are correct," replied James immediately. "My business partner Simon Herring left his company, an American trading house, in 1992 and came to Lincoln to start roasting in a shed – the traditional start! In those days, you could get a coffee roaster for the scrap value.

"In 1994 I left my position as a coffee buyer for Lyons, and we started in business together."

Today, craft roasting is a 'cool' occupation, but in those days it was an almost inexplicable choice.

"The attraction was in working for myself. Everyone I knew had their own business, I no longer had any intention of working for anyone else, and as we both knew about coffee, we decided to put that knowledge to use.

"In hindsight, the coffee market of 1994 was appallingly dull. It was dominated by big brands – Lyons, Douwe Egberts, Kenco, all of an average quality, and all in 8oz brick-packs.

"In those days, the retail marketing brands were the gods, and foodservice marketeers were just seen as jumped-up salesmen. Retail dictated foodservice... and now it's the other way round. The foodservice sector has led the consumer in what to expect from coffee, the consumer has moved on, and yet much of the retail sector has stayed dull, complicated and confusing.

"For us, at first, it was dreadful trying to sell coffee here... we sold to golf clubs, hairdressers, anyone who would have us.

"But we knew things were changing, because we had watched what was happening in the States, and indeed I had done a presentation to the Lyons board suggesting that they consider changing the concept of the traditional corner tea houses to reflect what was beginning to happen with the new coffee houses from the States.

"How did that go down? Like a load of bricks!"

He had just as much success with the railway authorities, when in 1994 he wrote to Railtrack in York, suggesting an American coffee bar to be sited in the station there – he still keeps the letter saying it would 'not be appropriate'. (Seventeen years later, in 2011, even Starbucks was told that it had to remove its kiosk at that station, follow-

Lincoln and York - twenty years of discreet roasting

Which coffee roaster has the biggest capacity in the UK? It's one which has no brand of its own... many operators use Lincoln and York coffee without knowing it



ing a planning inspector's ruling that it spoiled the character of the historic building.)

The new Lincoln and York was, however, determined to buy good beans. At the beginning, not the currently-fashionable obscure ones, but good sound quality.

"The 'exotic' origins had certainly been opened up by that stage,

new origins and new roasts, or respond to the developing coffee market? Are they a market leader or market-led?

"We were one of the first to buy El Salvador when nobody else saw it as an espresso, but to be honest, we are generally market-led. Because we are the manufacturer behind a lot of coffee brands, we don't do any shouting.

“ On the whole, the emergence of ‘artisan’ roasters is a good thing... the bar in the UK has now been raised high. ”

- James Sweeting

although what was not yet known was the modern concept of 'micro-lots'.

"We had both trained at origin, and in hindsight, what we lacked in capital and market presence, we compensated for by our knowledge of origins and sourcing... and that is still our strength.

"All the coffee importers knew us already, and so we were buying good commercial Colombian and Brazilian coffees.

"I used to buy from Stephen Hurst (who later founded the Mercanta coffee importing business, and the London School of Coffee) when he was with his previous trading house, and it was when I left Lyons that he said 'I've been thinking of doing something for myself, too...'"

Today, Lincoln and York's diversity of product is quite breathtaking. Did Lincoln and York lead in developing

list of highest-achieving and fastest-growing privately-owned companies in the region. It is expanding into a new roaster building - and in spite of its size and influence, it was complimented by a rival as being 'the best compromise between a craft roaster and an industrial one.'

"I think people will still agree with that," is the careful response from a not-displeased Sweeting. "We operate on an industrial scale, and we have the biggest capacity in the UK.

"People are shocked when they see our capacity, but we come at this business with the same attitude of serving a wide range of customers looking for a lot of different quantities and qualities, whether they want thirty kilos or a hundred tonnes."

Recent developments have even taken Lincoln and York into packing coffee into capsules. This has been the fastest-growing worldwide coffee development, but there are still relatively few suppliers who can do it.

"It's a hell of an investment. Roasting the coffee is the easy bit... the Nespresso-compatible packing is the hard part.

"There are now companies who have begun to develop these machines, so you can now go out and buy a capsule machine on the open market... but it's a lot of money. It's millions."

The second roastery is not being opened for reasons of size alone.

"There are two strands to the idea. The first is to have a 'contingency' roastery, and while we hope nothing will ever happen to make us need it, we will be the only roaster in the country to have one, and our biggest customers say they take great comfort from us doing this.

"The new roastery will also be focussed on the small and speciality side, with a slightly different approach to new product ideas. We have commissioned a new thirty-kilo roaster, a delightful little machine, for this 'quality' market."

That, of course, is the same market which has been attacked by the new breed of artisan roasters who seem to keep cropping up under railway arches in virtually every town.

Is this a good thing for the trade in general, and is the quality of roasting in the UK now generally high? With more independents on the scene, is the general standard of coffee roasting better?

"I would say so. Overall, this is a

good thing, although it can be initially irritating to have them snapping away at our trade clients – they do all go through the training courses, but there is a lot of difference between learning on a sample roaster and working a commercial twenty-kilo one, and it's true that some do an appalling job and produce undrinkable coffee, but that may be down to youthful exuberance.

"So there are some who are in it to be hip and cool, and some of their 'lifestyle businesses' may not survive... but on the whole, the emergence of 'artisan' roasters is a good thing for the industry. Generally, they are trying to do the right things, and the bar in the UK has now been raised high."

Lincoln and York has always been active out at origin. Because both

of land are going to be doing which crops.

"Another problem is that they carry on growing the same cycle... sometimes you will see a line of straggly old coffee bushes, and ask why don't they prune them, because they could improve the yield a lot – and they reply: 'that line of bushes is where my land ends and my neighbour's land starts, so I never touch that row of trees!'

"How far we go down the road of 'educating' coffee farmers is a very difficult thing to judge. I understand farming, but I can only identify issues and encourage them to pay attention... I'm not ducking the issue here, but I only have so many hours in my day."

As his company has remained below the parapet and kept a very low

“ How far we go down the road of 'educating' coffee farmers is a difficult thing to judge – you do tend to hit a brick wall when talking to some co-operatives ”

partners come from farming families, they take a very practical interest in the work of those who grow their coffee, although this can occasionally lead to exasperation.

Typically, their report of a recent trip to Uganda includes the perceptive note that 'we quickly spotted a massive opportunity for the farmers to benefit from some education on husbandry – particularly composting, pruning and tree replacement. Typically each tree currently is yielding 4.8-10.8kg of cherry which in turn delivers 0.8-1.8kg of parchment, a relatively low yield which could easily be improved'.

Such opinions from buyers with farming experience tend to be worth listening to. Has the farmer's son from the east of England been able to positively assist farmers at origin?

"On that Uganda trip, we realised that yield is their biggest issue. That land is so fertile, they can grow anything – I've never seen land like it, the best soil and conditions I've ever seen. But it doesn't matter how high a price your coffee could fetch for quality, if there's not enough on the tree.

"You do tend to hit a brick wall when talking to some farmers' co-operatives about this, because they have a different agenda. Different co-ops have different agendas with regard to training farmers, and the target for some of them is just to do what will attract the best funding from the west.

"And then you get unexpected problems – in Uganda, there is a custom that a farmer's land is split equally among the children, and this causes great problems in knowing what units

profile, with no Lincoln and York branded product, it is quite possible that many operators use James Sweeting's coffee without knowing where it was roasted. However, the company has made several recent creative moves which have led to great recognition by the street-level barista.

In 2012 it launched its own coffee shop awards, with the entrants being the customers of its own distributor network.

"It runs again this year, although it has not achieved what we hoped it would," comes the candid assessment from James Sweeting. "It was not received as readily by our distributors as we hoped, and was not promoted as much as we would have liked. We had very good entries, but just not enough of them.

"What it did achieve was enthusiasm within the establishments who were nominated."

The company also moved quite quickly to take up the chance to become a certified City & Guilds training centre in barista skills. Very few C&G barista training centres are involved with roasteries.

"It was our sales director's idea, and at first the benefit seemed to be that we would see more of our customers... but we all very quickly came round to the realisation of just how much demand there is for this. Our courses are now all full, every single time.

"A great benefit of it is that we now know much more about what our ultimate customers are doing with our coffee!"

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FILTRATION & PROCESS

Knowing how to apply some pressure...

A big issue being addressed by two exhibitors at this year's London Coffee Festival is the matter of tamping and its effect on coffee quality.

How crucial is tamping to coffee quality and consistency? In the TUCO barista championships, reported elsewhere in this magazine, there were several questions of consistency, which the judges partly put down to bad tamping.

"There were large variations in the tamping," confirmed judge Justin Slawson, from Ferns Coffee. "Chrissie Huxter (the technical judge, from Tchibo) also mentioned this to me." Fellow judge Randal Paterson, from the BSA, agreed: "I talked with Chrissie about the tamping, and when I asked 'what were the most common weaknesses?', it was her first observation."

An extremely challenging response to this will be the new machine will be on show from Coffee Omega.

It is not a subject which has ever been specifically researched, but Abdul Rokib, managing director of Coffee Omega, says that it is a known and accepted problem that different



The PuqPress tamper

baristas in the same café may tamp coffee differently... and that sometimes the same barista, depending on circumstances, can tamp coffee well or badly.

"A barista champion would have a consistent tamp technique, but how many champions are there? Very few!

"From speaking to some major players in the world of espresso, we have understood that one of the inconsis-

tencies in espresso is tamping, because the force applied makes a major difference. Our new auto tamp eliminates these inconsistencies."

The product is the Puqpress, an automated coffee tamper that provides constant pressure. The operator selects the pressure required for the coffee, and inserts the portafilter – once set, the pressure appears on a display and the machine will simply keep on tamping to that pressure, without variation, at 1.3 seconds per measure.

This, says the maker, is considerably faster for service in a busy period than having staff tamp manually.

How economical a solution is this?

"It is economical in the long term where there is high turnaround of staff," remarks Coffee Omega. "At £295, it is also very economical in high-volume establishments. We have coffee shops in the Netherlands praising this solution as an alternative to hand tamping."

In rather traditional contrast, Jaguar is going to display what it believes to be a big advance in the conventional process of manual tamping. This is the Pullman tamper from Australia which has just become the prize sponsor for the barista championships, a move which has gone by without any publicity.

"Good tamping makes a big difference to your coffee," remarks Jaguar's managing director, James Russell. "If you put 10lb of pressure on your coffee compared to 20lb, then for a multitude of reasons you will get a different result from the coffee."

"The Pullman tampers are better because of a couple of big differences. Most tampers are made along the lines of 'if they're heavy, they're good'.

"By comparison, the Pullman is quite light, for several reasons. If you're doing 200-500 a day, weight will give you 'fatigue' issues, and many baristas will tamp once, turn, and tamp again, which can be difficult with a heavy tamper – the Pullman is easier to 'twist'.

"It is easier to sit in the palm of your hand – an 18-year-old girl barista and an old man will have different hands, so in the lower part of the neck is a feature you can adjust.

"The base is 'lined' - you can use the lines on the edge to assess the tamping pressure. If your grind is constant, and if you always tamp to this line, you'll get a consistent result.

"We weren't going to take on another tamper product, but when we saw this, and realised how you can work

with it, we thought it unique. We do believe that you can now get tamping consistency with this product."

There are interchangeable handles, of aluminium and wood, and the bases are flat.

"The majority of the tampers we sell are flat-base, and although many tamper makers offer different sizes, the reality is that they are not always correct. Pullman offer a 53mm and a 58mm, but also 58.1mm and so on - they will also make specific sizes on request.

"Technically, every aspect we want to be covered in a hand tamper has been covered."



The Pullman, being shown by Jaguar - the adjustment ring and the tamping guide lines can be seen

Jaguar will also be showing the new 'green' version of Puly Caf, the espresso machine cleanser.

"The difference in the new product is that it has no phosphate in it at all - it is a chemical-free cleanser," explains James Russell.

"Arguably, a small amount of phosphate does make for a better cleanser, but for those in the catering trade who are cautious about the chemical ingredient of what they use, this is a better product. There is a tiny amount of phosphate in the Puly Red product, but not in the Puly Green.

"The entire product is organic and non-hazardous, and is the only one on the market like this - there are others which say they are organic, and aren't, and every competitor cleanser has to carry a hazard sign – Puly does not.

"There is a slightly higher price for the green one - we don't know what it is yet, but we don't expect it to be that much higher."

A great London Coffee Festival offer from...

Coffee Omega



We are giving away FREE 6kg of speciality beans and FREE cleaning materials with any La Spaziale 2-groups purchased...

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(see elsewhere in this magazine)

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The London Coffee Festival is at the Old Truman Brewery, Brick Lane, from 3-6 April.

The 3rd-4th are trade days.

Re-usable takeaway cups at London fest

There continues to be a lot happening in re-usable takeaway cups as an alternative to throwaway paper, and several players will be showing at the London Festival.

An unusual one comes from Joco. This is a reusable glass cup, which the company says 'has arrived to redefine the takeaway coffee and tea drinking experience'. The argument is that glass, rather than plastic, is 'the truest path to untainted taste and optimal environmental sustainability for reusable cups'. The range is of 12oz and 8oz cups, with a 16oz to come. The cups are made of high grade, strengthened, borosilicate glass with a thermal silicone sleeve and lid.

The first big arrival in reusable takeaway cups, KeepCup, will also be at the show. This brand, we are now told, will also have a new glass-based product. You can see the family resemblance to the familiar existing product.

The biggest newcomer in the re-usable takeaway cup sector is Mug For Life, where Ross Thornley began his project in 2009, and now offers the British-made alternative to the bigger brands, the only takeaway mug with a screw-top lid, and with a double-wall design for drink insulation and holding comfort.

"We are sustainable as we go," he says, "planting a tree in the UK for every ten sold."

The takeaway industry has never really got to grips with the waste, recovery or recycling aspects of its product – the guesstimates of how many paper cups are in circulation range so widely that they are clearly all guesses!

What is the size of the situation to which the re-usables respond?

"We believe the annual numbers are well in excess of 130 million from the top two players alone – the vast reality of the numbers is not difficult to see. It's the social wave that's a hard one to move – Starbucks adjusted their own target for consumers using reusables, down from five per cent to just 1.9 per cent, so even they are finding it hard to get people to change their disposable habits."

Even so, he says, once users get into the habit of a reusable mug, they stick with it.

"The effect needs to be habitual and not fleeting... we named our brand Mug For Life as we want to help people connect their choices with the impacts they can make by themselves.

"We know customers who have used our mugs every day for over three years – we know these people are few, but we are already influencing change in a small way."

The use of a screw-top lid, possibly unique in these products, is consid-



Mug for Life

ered to be a significant safety feature, even though it surprises both some users and some baristas.

"We feel that while a 'pop-on, pop-off' lid is the industry standard, to get a good seal on a re-usable means this is often quite tight, and when the mug is filled with hot liquid, it is prone to dangerous mishaps.

"We wanted to get the benefit of screw lids for increased security without making it look like just another travel mug – a screw lid with rubber o-ring seal is a huge step forward in safety.

"The unexpected challenge was finding that everyone still expects our lids to be a pop-off, like all the others – so, when they first get hold of one, that's what they try to do! When we show that it's a screw top lid, they light up, smile, nod, and say 'now, that's nice'.

"But having given mine to many a barista and see them try to pull it off, I now pass it to them without the lid so I can securely screw it back on once they have filled it!"

What is the financial argument in support of the product, from the café owner's point of view? Is there a worthwhile margin for selling the product? Does a café operator benefit with the offer of '20p off if you bring your own cup'?

"Starbucks have been doing this for decades and I still get mine if I ever go - it's shown on the receipt. It depends on the coffee shop's values: to me, offering discount for bringing in your own mug to me says a lot about the values of the café.

"For a café to sell a custom-branded Mug For life we can do orders of 120, and the margins are good. The added value comes in a few ways - supporting UK manufacture is a big hit for many of our customers. The quality of product which comes from this is also a big bonus. We also have a few options for retail packaging, boxes which give increased product value and make it a desirable gift purchase."



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03-06 APRIL 2014

This year's London festival is notable for both the seminars and information sessions as much as the exhibits...

DR Wakefield is holding a series of talks which we rather like - generally, the timetable allows for the subjects to be revisited once a day across the four days, and one we really like is the introduction of the Café Femenino project, which appeared in this magazine last month. This is a project which aims to empower female farmers using the production and sale of their own product as the vehicle to create social change. (David Warr of Cooper's Coffee in Jersey has written a fascinating small book which explains it).

One topic which crops up on several occasions is a Wakefield discussion of how the Swiss Water decaffeination process works. There has been a resurgence of interest in the possibilities of decaf, and it is noticeable that elsewhere at the London Fest, we expect Sea Island Coffee to unveil their Decadent Decaf Coffee Co. This is all about 'shaking up decaf', the

company's Guy Wilmot tells us. "We haven't told anyone yet as we're still working on it, and the first glimpse will be at the London Festival, but we feel that decaf has been ignored for too long."



An equally argumentative tone regarding coffee comes from Black Sheep, which is one of the few suppliers to positively argue for the benefits of robusta coffee, in what it calls 'the robusta revival'.

"Given that there is only so much you can do differently in the world of arabicas, we wanted to shed light on the coffees that are not receiving the same level of recognition," the company told us.

"Robusta coffee has some great features and can taste amazing - if you get the right produce. It is lower in acidity, is easier on the stomach, has a higher caffeine content, makes excellent crema and can give a full-bodied and highly aromatic taste experience. Given that so many in the UK drink their coffees with milk it also has the benefit of punching through the milk.

"We source exclusively from the Sethuraman Estate in India, one of the few producers of truly high quality robusta. The best speciality grade robustas, so-called 'fine robusta' coffees, are fully able to stand up on their own against specialty grade arabica in expert blind tastings. There are many



In unashamed praise of decaf - the new range from Sea Island

people in the trade who have never tasted a fine robusta.

"We love coffee, but we are not snobbish about it and recognise that people have different preferences... we do think, however, that the coffee we offer is something really special."

One of the most entertaining of the various coffee contests is the latte art one, and the Cravendale brand will be running its own variation on the idea. In the 'official' contests, the entrant has to submit a picture of the design they propose to pour, and are then judged on how close they get to it. The Cravendale competition will be more relaxed, we're told - baristas will be able to free-pour their entry, and then the challenging barista has to replicate the first barista's pour.

The judge determines which is better, and the 'loser' of each round then gets the letter M, I, L or K. The first barista to spell out MILK is eliminated, while the winner then goes on to the next round.

There will be four heats across Thursday and Friday, with a winner from each heat going into the final on Sunday afternoon.

The winner gets a rather generous prize - a paid-for journey to origin, on a trip organised by Freeman Trading of London (who were featured in this paper recently - they're the ones who hauled a solar panel up a mountain for five hours to give a coffee farmer's family their first electricity!)

La Cimbali wants to use the festival to help operators get inside the details of certain basic espresso technology. Daring to use the expression 'fourth wave', the company will present a daily session on the science of the drink, and will explore how the technology and the effect of grind, pressure profiling, temperature control and milk preparation all contribute to the final result in the cup.

Among the machines, Cimbali will show the M100 and invite baristas to see how they can change the flavour

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characteristics of a drink by adjusting the pressure during the extraction. The Perfect Grinding System will also be available for inspection and test, and there will also be a new mid-price machine.

Rather unusually for a machine brand, Cimballi is also hosting a roaster pop-up, in which York Coffee Emporium will show a variety of blends including an unusual honey-processed Nicaraguan, described as 'delivering the nutty caramel that the Nicaraguans are famous for but also a hint of sweet lime'.

Elsewhere in the how-to section of



Another new idea on show - the iced chocolate menu, by Marimba

the show, there is a very unusual presentation by Matt Perger, who was the World Brewers' Cup champ in 2012 and has twice been in the top three of the world barista championship, and Lachlan Ward, the Australian Brewers' Cup champion. They will be talking about the refractometer, and here we enter the dizzy world of 'total dissolved solids' and the real science of what happens in coffee brewing.

The science of what is required from coffee grounds (and, indeed, what is not) is a subject which agitates the time of many intellectually-led baristas, while leaving thousands of others completely cold - but it all goes to tell you, in scientific terms, what you really managed to 'extract' from your brewing.

(There will, we hear, be a similar development at **Rancilio** - the interesting remark by the company's Marco Olmi is: "our message is... don't dismiss new ideas until you've tried them. Come here and try them!")

Union Hand Roasted attracted a great deal of attention last year by having a working roaster on site - during the public days, it may well have been the first time that many consumers saw this side of the coffee business. This year, Union will hold three or four sessions a day, and will devote each day to a different geographic region.

And there is a competition element - in a more casual variation on the professional Cup Tasters competition, visitors will be invited to taste three coffees and, against the clock, identify the odd one out.

Last year, the winner wasn't some-

A big question which arose from the recent debate about takeaway cup litter was the question of messaging - literally, if a takeaway cup carries the message 'do not throw this in the gutter', will anyone take any notice? And if they do not, what message will get across to them?

The giant cup maker Solo, which will be showing at the London Fest, has long been active in the debate about coffee cup littering, and managing director Tony Waters is convinced that the beverage trade in general must not lose the momentum of the recent debate.

"The feeling has always been: 'what can we do?' I don't believe that as one isolated company, we can do it ourselves.

"But on a European basis, as part of Pack2Go (of which he has been a senior member) we have now formed a network of European litter associations, who previously never met unless by accident.

"When we looked at the dilemma, we worked to understand the dynamics of it. The experts say that there will always be people who will drop litter, come what may, and that the best we can aim for is to reduce it. What I think will happen is that we will find areas of critical mass, and that mass may have a waste value which pays for the operation as a whole."

Following this work, the packaging people have been confident enough to apply to the EC for backing.

"The network has now applied for EC funding for education, and for the sharing of materials - up to now, there is no common way of assessing litter!

"So we have engaged with the EC, and to be heard by them, you have to earn your place in the dialogue - we have had to win our seat at the table. We are not game-playing with this, and we are not toying with it for PR purposes."

One of the first results will be Clean Up Europe Week, in May.

The packaging companies are involved - but has there been dialogue with the big coffee chains?

"This is a bigger issue than coffee chains alone, but it would be a very good idea for them to sit down and talk about it," agrees Waters.

"McDonald's have the highest profile on tackling the issue, and they have shown that there are things that can be done. The corporate chains tend to have different reactions to all this, but I do think they are beginning to see that as big brands, they are now being singled out.

"These big brands do have an interest in this, because it's their name in the gutter - the great problem is in joining up the parts. What we have to do is treat this as a collective, non-competitive approach, looking at the best for our industry as a whole."

One of the more bizarre aspects of the recent litter debate was the sug-

The takeaway trade hasn't peaked yet...

... and so, nor has the takeaway cup disposal problem

gestion that those big brands would prefer not to be openly involved in tackling litter, for fear that they would attract the wrong image, and simply



Tony Waters gets down to the packaging litter problem

well. Takeaway hasn't peaked here yet, and while Europe and the Americans do seem to uncover even more opportunities than we do, the UK is still finding more outlets. More operators are realising that coffee will bring people in, and that all of them will spend.

"What the Waitrose controversy illustrates, although one would not comment on the detail of that particular promotion, is how much coffee is a 'draw'. I don't believe how much this was predicted, but it has now been made very clear."

As a consequence, the opportunity for cup messaging is also growing.

"There is a big question of whether, or how, the right messaging will make a difference to those who are inclined to litter.

"However, one way you can get attention is by changing your cup messaging regularly, and it is surprising that a lot of people still haven't got this idea.

"One example about messaging which strikes me more and more is this - when Dragons Den was still quite new and novel, someone went on and said they were selling umbrellas from a machine. The question was, how would they make money? And they answered - by selling advertising on the machine."

There is a parallel with cups, says Tony Waters.

"There is still a general concept in the coffee trade of the cup advertising the point of its origin - that is, the cup identifies the store from which it was bought. What has not yet been significantly developed is the question of 'associated advertising'.

"The instances you see of this are still few, and this is an area which has legs. We must have been before our time in advocating this for so long... mobile advertising on the takeaway cup is still a big opportunity."

end up becoming scapegoats for causing the problem in the first place.

There are equally bizarre parallels, notes Tony Waters with a grin.

"People should not be drinking hot beverages while they drive, but the fact is that they do. And the fact is that when they tip the cup back, then they're looking at the roof, not at the road.

"There is a similar issue around this - if the cup industry were to work towards countering this by product design, would we be praised for safety-consciousness, or thought to be encouraging the dangerous practice of drinking coffee while driving?"

Nonetheless, he observes, the industry is still way behind on its attitude to 'messaging', and not least on the concept of 'effective messaging' on cups.

Typically, says Solo, the reason for the standard message saying 'contents may be hot' on coffee cups is not because anyone expects a consumer to read it - it's a defence against legal issues. If a scalding case comes to court, the beverage supplier can say 'we told you to be careful'.

By contrast, positive messages hold potential. As the takeaway market grows, says Tony Waters, so does the opportunity to use cups to say something.

"The takeaway market is still going up. When the recession hit, there were wonders of whether everything would downgrade, but it has held up

Vegware, the supplier of compostable cups and packaging, is supporting Parkinson's Awareness Week with free napkins. The project runs from 7-13 April, and Vegware is offering a campaign pack of 800 free specially-branded napkins, and an awareness week poster to display, to the first 250 cafes who sign up to support the cause. Cafes are also being recruited by Cappuccino Ads, an Edinburgh advertising agency which distributes free branded coffee cups to cafes across Scotland.

The head of marketing for the Parkinson's campaign has made the quite reasonable observation that napkins are rarely used to convey an important message.


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The London Coffee Festival

... continued from page 13

one from the industry, but a novice coffee drinker visiting on one of the consumer days. "He clearly had a great palate," Union's Alan Miller told us, "because we don't make it too easy!"

Last month, we were almost certainly the first coffee news magazine to write about **Alma de Cuba** the new coffee brand linked with a café in Waterloo, and a campaign to invest in Cuba's mountain farmers and restart the island's coffee industry. This is the chance to taste it.

Remarkably little is said to the trade by **Alpro**, the soya specialist (or to be precise, the company 'with a vision of a world where more of what we eat comes directly from plants'). It began with soy milk, and 'yogurt alternatives' and 'dessert alternatives', but this is the chance to taste almond and soya porridge, smoothies and soyaccinos.

Andronicas is generally known as a roaster of high-quality coffees and for having provided a roast-to-order service in, of all places, Harrods. There is a lot more to it - a very notable new

arrival is the move towards bird-friendly coffees, four of which should be available at the show.

However, there are useful other products - look for the vacuum storage pot. "Keeping roast coffee fresh has been a dilemma for all coffee enthusiasts since we first discovered you could roast it, grind it and infuse it" says the company.

"Oxygen is the villain here and our vacuum pot is so effective, every coffee enthusiast should have one. The oxygen is removed down to the level of the coffee and kept that way, maximising the aroma and taste for longer."

This will probably be the trade's first chance to chat with **Beanergi**, who we have recently reported, and whose aim is to 'revolutionise the way the coffee industry handles its coffee waste'. This is a renewable energy supplier, creating low-cost energy generated from used coffee grounds, the coffee industry's organic waste.

Much has been said about the number of new boutique tea brands, and how many of them simply buy their blends off the shelf - at the **Tea People**, this is changing.

"As we are a speciality tea company, our aim is to let the trade know about 'proper teas', and help create some unique blends for them, under their own labels.

"Yes, we have the in-house capability for creating blends and flavoured



One of the entirely new products on show - drinking fudge

teas of our own. While we did start off by selling some 'off the shelf' blends, we are in the process of replacing many of those with our own blends.

"We have already done a few totally bespoke blends for clients."

Lavazza has an unusual new product - a new single-origin limited-edition coffee from Ethiopia. This is a high-priced and high-quality product which, Lavazza points out, is considerably higher-priced than the standard Lavazza Professional beans range. It will probably be sold in a gift box. The week after the festival, Lavazza will sponsor a Slow Food Chef Alliance coffee training session, a direct project about debating with chefs the importance of high quality coffee in restaurants.

There is still a lot to see in the world of capsules - at the London festival, look for **Cafe Pod**, the company which offers premium Nespresso-alterna-

tives. The same idea comes from **Caffe Cagliari**, which is showing its Nespresso-compatibles for the first time in Britain, and also from **Crukafa**, which offers Fairtrade all-Arabica coffees in recyclable Nespresso-compatible pods.

A rather new hot beverage can be tasted at **Fudge Kitchen**. This is Drinking Fudge, offered in trade packs in two flavours, chocolate and orange, but with samplings of a sea-salt caramel version as well.

And we certainly recommend trying a variation on an existing beverage at **Marimba**. This is the brand which specialises in drinking chocolate made with flaked chocolate, which it calls 'melts' - many operators say that the flake format makes for a more convenient preparation.

However, Marimba will also be discussing a less-familiar version, the iced chocolate drink. "This allows you to offer the same selling point of real single-origin chocolate, as opposed to a powder or syrup-based alternative," says Marimba's Brad Wright. "You make them by adding 40gm into a blender jug, add a tiny dash of hot water to turn to paste, blend into cold milk, and pour over ice. The results are fantastic.

"The beauty is that as the weather changes and gets warmer, you can advertise iced chocolate, then as it gets cold, swap to hot - it's a drink for all year with no extra product lines."

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A rather bizarre variation of America's Bulletproof coffee is now being promoted in the UK. Bulletproof is not just a coffee – it is a kind of self-improvement brand created by Dave Asprey of California (where else?!) based on the apparently-simple question: what are the simplest things you can do to be better at everything?

His concept of 'bulletproof' involves the achievement of 'the state of high performance where you take control of and improve your biochemistry, your body, and your mind so they work in unison, helping you execute at levels far beyond what you'd expect, without burning out, getting sick, or allowing stress to control your decisions'.



Part of this involves Bulletproof coffee, promoted as the lowest-toxin and highest-performance coffee, and in America you can buy a special edition of the coffee with Brain Octane Oil (we're not making this up!) at \$64.95.

We know little about the coffee, we regret, but the brain oil features coconut and palm kernel, and the idea is that: 'coffee transports the octane oil into the cells faster, and the oil serves as the synergist to



Kaldi

increase absorption of coffee's major minerals'. The essential final ingredient is – butter.

Now, there have been many recent stories about travellers in the east being served coffee with yak butter in it, and the Bulletproof man says: "I learned about the power of butter at 18,000 feet of elevation in Tibet – I staggered into a guest house from minus ten degrees, and was literally rejuvenated by a creamy cup of yak butter tea.

"After a couple of years of careful research, that was the genesis of the recipe which now has a massive impact on cognitive function. I use the lowest toxin, highest performance coffee there is, I brew it, and then I blend unsalted, grass-fed butter into it, along with an extract of coconut oil that improves brain energy. This is the ultimate drink of the high performance entrepreneur."



A café in Plymouth has come under fire in the local press for flying the Union flag upside down... the local paper pointed out that to do so, particularly in a seafaring town, is recognised as a signal that 'this operator is in distress'.



The Waitrose scandal, in which the supermarket chain has continued to endanger the livelihood of independent cafes with its free coffee offer, while claiming to be supporting local communities, has taken yet another odd turn. The Financial Times reported that the shadow communities minister has written to every MP with a Waitrose in their constituency, asking them to campaign against the offer, and to write to the company's managing director to argue that 'his company is acting in a way that will further destroy the British high street'.

This was immediately followed by a dig from the conservativehome.com website, which suggested that a million free Waitrose coffees each week reduces the cost of living by £114 million each year, and asked why the Labour party would wish to stop something that saves people money. However, the site added, the 'unfortunate footnote to this fiasco is that the MP in question is a Co-operative Party MP, funded by the Co-operative Group, one of Waitrose's competitors. Has he declared this conflict of interest?'

The Co-operative Party is (we are told) partly financed by the Co-operative retail group, and does not contest elections but runs joint candidates with the Labour Party – Co-operative Party members are barred from being members of parties other than Labour. It is, we are told, 'the only UK party controlled by a major corporation'.



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