

taste buds

chef Larry
Janes



Day starts with cups of hot java

Don't even attempt a conversation until I've had my first cup. It's an eye-opener.

It's a warmer-upper. Adults (over the age of 18) drink an average of 2.3 cups per day. I need that just to get going.

I know of few kitchen cupboards that don't hold coffee in some form: ground, whole bean or powdered. Whether you purchase it from Colombia, Brazil, Jamaica or Hawaii, the coffee in cans is a combination of beans from two or more regions. It's a good bet, however, that most coffee purchased is a mixture of Arabica and Robusta beans. These start out as a nondescript green bean whose aroma and taste are exposed during a roasting process, when heat causes them to expand like popcorn kernels, changing their color and bringing their characteristic flavor and aroma to the surface.

We can thank a certain Mullah (a Mahometan priest) from the Middle East for our caffeine addiction. He was told by shepherds that each time his goats ate the berries of a certain shrub they would remain awake, jumping the whole night. Sound familiar? The Mullah made himself a potent brew and, needless to say, spent the whole night in a state of delicious intoxication, which did not affect his intellectual capacities.

THIS WAS BACK in the 15th century. Since then, word has passed down and the demand for coffee steadily increased.

Coffee was hardly known in Europe before the 17th century. Travelers, who had acquired a taste for the awakening brew, brought it first to Italy in 1615 and then to Paris in 1645. By 1670, coffee was highly prized and the demand was so great that it was rare and the price was as steep as a solid gold European coffee maker.

Like wine, coffee gives its greatest production in the plains, but the best qualities come from the higher altitudes of the torrid zone, especially mountain-grown varieties that are difficult to reap and transport.

Did you know that today's industrial roasted coffees are sometimes processed with a small amount of sugar molasses to "coat" the berries and give them better color and helps prevent the loss of aroma?

After roasting, coffee loses much of its aroma, so true modern-day coffee aficionados are now looking to gourmet coffee shops to roast whole beans "on the spot" and in small amounts (exceeding \$10 per pound) to assure the best tastes and aromas. Having just cashed a paycheck, yours truly ventured out to one of these beaneries to see if it really did make a difference. To the basic coffee drinker, a great cup of coffee is something to behold, savor and sip appreciatively. I find the difference somewhat notable, like the difference between sipping cognac and brandy, but in all honesty, the true secret to a great cup of coffee is really in the brewing.

FIRST OFF, match the grind of coffee to the method. Percolators should use a regular grind, while automatic electric, drip and filter-cone coffee makers should use drip grinds. Vacuum coffee makers should use a fine grind. Espresso makers should always use the finest grind available, almost powdery.

The best measure is approximately 2 level tablespoons to 6 ounces of freshly drawn water that has been brought to a boil. Too much coffee makes a bitter brew, too little coffee a weak brew. I can't really say too much about percolators and automatic-drip makers because they really boil the brew or fail to heat enough to extend through what should be an eight-minute brewing cycle.

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Requesting your recipe

We know you've got good taste. In fact, we'd like to have your recipe for turkey stuffing.

At our request, readers have been sending in recipes for their favorite way to stuff the Thanksgiving holiday bird. Recipes are coming in from all over the Observer & Eccentric's readership area. And the cooks are proving to be quite diverse in their choice of ingredients and methods of preparation.

We'd like your recipe, by Saturday, Oct. 31. Please send to: Taste, Observer & Eccentric, P.O. Box 3503, Birmingham 48012.

As many recipes as space permits will be printed, around Thanksgiving time.

COFFEE

Specialty brews appeal

ONCE YOU TRY this kind of coffee you are hooked forever," says Monica George of the Merchant of Vino specialty stores.

The "kind of coffee" to which George refers is the specialty coffee. These fragrant, robust coffees bear exotic names from faraway. They are the Blue Mountain coffee from Jamaica and the Kona from Hawaii.

Other coffees beg to caress the palate with such unusual flavors as Bavarlan chocolate, vanilla, mocha, java and orange brandy.

Is gourmet coffee simply another yuppie fad? Or are these enthusiasts onto something truly wonderful?

"Coffee isn't a yuppie thing at all," said George, a Southfield resident. "A good cup of coffee is a necessity."

Some coffee drinkers require only that their morning brew be strong and hot. These people might be perfectly content with a wide range of supermarket brands.

But sales of specialty, or gourmet coffees also are perkling.

"We've always sold a lot of coffee," George said.

"Everybody is buying beans." The Merchant of Vino, with stores in Birmingham, Troy and Southfield, sells wines, cheeses and other specialty items. Also sold are "50 to 60" varieties of coffee beans, said George, daughter of owners Ed and Juliette Jona.

LIKE MOST specialty shops, the Merchants of Vino stores its coffee beans in bins. Although the beans may be ground on the premises, purists insist on buying beans and grinding them as they are used, to ensure maximum freshness.

Among the most popular varieties are the 100 percent Colombian coffee, the Jamaican Blue Mountain and Kona from the big island of Hawaii. Merchant of Vino also combines different varieties to create its

own special blends, many of which are named after family members and celebrity customers.

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Here's best way to make good coffee

Is there anything more tantalizing than the fragrance of freshly brewed coffee?

But even the most expensive, top-quality coffee can be ruined by improper brewing. Here are a few suggestions from coffee retailers, to ensure best results:

- Use quality coffee that is fresh roasted. If possible, start with whole coffee beans. Grind only as much as you need. Freeze unused coffee in a dry, airtight container so it doesn't become stale.

- Use the correct grind and filter for your type of coffee maker. The coarseness of the grind will affect the taste of the coffee. Generally, the longer the brewing time, the coarser the grind. Faster brewing will require a fine grind.

- Make sure the coffee maker is clean and free of oil or residue. Always use fresh cold water in making coffee. Properly made coffee is best served within 30 minutes after being made. Never reheat coffee after it has cooled, as this will destroy the taste. If coffee must be made in advance, use a thermos.

Different blends created many places in the world

Once upon a time, coffee drinkers had little choice but to buy pre-packaged coffee in tins or sealed bags from their local supermarket.

Today, gourmet coffee is a hot-ticket item in specialty and bulk-food stores. Shoppers may select from dozens of varieties or blends of coffee from South America, the West Indies, Hawaii, Asia and the East Indian Islands.

Many specialty coffee beans are stored in bins. Small the tantalizing aroma. Note the various shades, ranging from the light brown of mild roasts to the very dark espresso bean.

Selections are a matter of personal taste. Sampling the different varieties can be a tasteful adventure.

The following varieties and descriptions were culled from marketing booklets published by several coffee companies. Many varieties are blended to create interesting tastes.

COLOMBIAN: One of the most popular varieties, with a full-bodied taste and rich aroma. Colombian is frequently blended with other beans.

HAWAIIAN KONA: Although it is expensive because of limited production, Hawaiian Kona is in great demand. This coffee often is grown on soil rich in volcanic deposits.

HAITIAN: Mellow and smooth, mildly sweet flavor with moderate acidity.

JAMAICAN BLUE MOUNTAIN: This is one of the world's rarest, and most expensive coffees. It is mellow, aromatic, mildly acid and full-bodied.

INDONESIAN JAVA: Full-bodied, very rich.

KENYAN: Grown on slopes near Mount Kilimanjaro. It is mild and aromatic.

Some people enjoy drinking coffee flavored with vanilla, chocolate, cinnamon and other flavors.



STEPHEN CANTRELL/staff photographer

Monica George, whose family owns the Merchant of Vino shops, fills a bag with specialty coffee at the Birmingham store where she works.

Confectionately Yours is her baby

By Mary Rodrigue
staff writer

Even though the shop is closed Mondays, Lorrie's Confectionately Yours in Livonia's Laurel Commons shopping center attracts a trickle of customers.

A woman raving about brioche is glad to hear she can special order the small popovers, which proprietor Lorrie Leonard describes as "a breakfast roll, more eggy than a croissant."

Unfortunately, none are in the oven this day. A construction worker looking for coffee is in luck. A couple of other potential pastry buyers are politely turned away.

And so it went one recent Monday morning. At 9 a.m., Leonard had already been on the job since 4 a.m. Chocoesakes and a few cookie trays were in the counter display, which would be brimming with tarts, fresh fruit tarts, chocolate mousse cups and eclairs by 8 a.m. Tuesday.

"It's just something I've always wanted to do. I enjoy baking," said Leonard, who opened shop in the plaza at Six Mile Road east of Newburgh Road in June 1986.

Although she has had no formal training as a pastry chef, some of Leonard's fondest early memories are of her mom in the kitchen of their Redford Township home baking pies and other treats for the family, which includes 10 children.

*SHE DID EVERYTHING from scratch. And she

'We use butter, whipped cream, fresh fruits and a high-quality chocolate here.'

— Lorrie Leonard
proprietor

used the best ingredients, like real butter," said Leonard, who has carried on the tradition.

"We use butter, whipped cream, fresh fruits and a high-quality chocolate here," she said.

Leonard came to her new career in a roundabout way. After completing early schooling at St. Valentine's in Redford and high school at Mercy in Farmington Hills, she received a degree in nursing from Grand Valley State College in Grand Rapids.

After several years as a registered nurse in neonatal intensive care at Children's Hospital and Grace Hospital in Detroit, she decided to realize the nagging dream.

"One has nothing to do with the other. I had always wanted to go into business. A lot of people assume that because I left nursing I must've hated it. That's not true. I don't think I'll stay out of it forever. I don't know. I'll just wait and see."



BILL BRESLER/staff photographer

Lorrie Leonard displays a platter of delicious truffles at her pastry shop, Lorrie's Confectionately Yours, at Laurel Commons in Livonia.

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