

# Something hip is brewing

**As Australia's coffee culture drip-feeds into the UK, customers are ever-more demanding when it comes to a good cup of Joe. So what can restaurant operators learn from this new breed of bean specialist?**

Words/Laura Price



**L**ove 'em or loath 'em, hipster coffee shops and their tattooed, bearded baristas are here to stay - and they're changing the way many people consume coffee. While a few years ago the flat white was a foreign concept for most British consumers, the Melbourne-born coffee is now a firm fixture on even the most mainstream high-street chain menu.

"It's a very different world now," says David Abrahamovitch, who started independent coffee shop Shoreditch Grind with his Australian business partner Kaz James in 2011. "People's knowledge hasn't necessarily changed, but their expectations have."

As education and awareness grow, more consumers are looking for quality coffee. Restaurants have raised their game significantly over the past five years but risk stagnation if they don't keep tabs on the more specialist end of the scene.

As non-specialists, some of the things dedicated coffee shops do won't be viable for restaurants to copy. Many coffee specialists carry a wide range of regularly changing beans. This is not advisable for most restaurants as volumes are likely to be lower and the coffee will go stale. But other things are relatively easy to introduce for a clear point of difference - for example cold brew coffee or locally roasted beans.

"People enjoy the experience of drinking coffee as it is - like enjoying whisky or wine," says Pete Gibson, founder of Grindsmith in Manchester. "Now they want to know where it's come from, what flavour they should expect from it and how it's produced."

Grindsmith, which was set up by Gibson and business partner Luke Tomlinson with funds from Kickstarter, prides itself on customer interaction and education and is among the places focusing on manual brewing. Most of its coffees are made using Kalita pour-overs and a siphon drip method that takes 20 minutes.

"Even though we sell it as £6 per siphon, which gives about two cups, people don't flinch at the price," says Gibson. "It's the finest cup of coffee you can get. Most places don't do it purely for the amount of time it takes. They'd rather do 100 espressos in 20 minutes."

While 20-minute siphon coffee won't be the right fit for all restaurants - although many are experimenting with more theatrical and esoteric brewing methods - there's still plenty that can be learnt from the hipsters, including investing in the equipment to produce a top-quality brew.

One independent that believes it has found the balance between great coffee and high volume is Shoreditch Grind, whose location outside Old Street tube station makes it one of the busiest coffee shops in London. Since opening four years ago, Grind & Co has expanded with Soho Grind, Holborn Grind, and most recently London Grind in London Bridge.

"We do the best coffee in London, but what differentiates us is in making it simple and quick for the customer," says Abrahamovitch. "Some independents can be intimidating - people feel

like they're expected to know everything about coffee. We know everything there is to know - we obsess over the minor details like how many bars of pressure in our machine - but we don't necessarily want the customer to have to know all that. We just want them to be able to order a coffee and for it not to take 20 minutes."

Abrahamovitch achieves this with the right equipment, staff training and the addition of new technology. Grind & Co uses La Marzocco Linea PB coffee machines, which he says are "the best machines for cranking out great coffee at high volume - they're real work horses that never let you down". All his machines have iPads mounted on the side, and orders go through an electronic system rather than being printed on to paper slips.

"It was taking so long to make each coffee that we weren't getting people through fast enough," he says. "We changed every bit of machinery to cope with the volume, we have up to four or five baristas on at any one time, and we have an electronic rather than paper system. It's the kind of thing they do in drive-thrus. We're using the good bits about that kind of technology but keeping it very high quality."

The chain also uses Simonelli grinders, which have in-built heaters and air conditioning units to keep the beans at a constant temperature in an ever-changing environment like a coffee shop or restaurant. "Everyone obsesses with what machine you've got, but actually the grinder is equally, if not more, important," says Abrahamovitch. "Where some places might have one of those grinders, we have three or four in each location. That allows us to do volume and keep things consistent and cut time stopped to reload the grinder. We did a free coffee day at London Grind and made over 1,000 coffees in four hours. Not many independent places could crank out that kind of volume."

While espresso-based coffee is the best option for high volume, many independents focus on filter coffee for its more nuanced taste. The Coffee Lab, which started as a shop in Twickenham and now operates pop-ups around London, uses V60 and Chemex filter methods to provide a different taste that founder George Vasili says differentiates the brand from high-street chains.

"Filter coffees are good for people who don't



Playing a grinder: Grind & Co claims to make the best coffee in London

## THE INSIDER



John Sutcliffe *Out of home and convenience channel controller, Taylor's of Harrogate*

### What are the most common tea making mistakes in restaurants?

I believe that tea is sometimes an afterthought. People tend to concentrate more on coffee and, therefore, we do not see the same amount of care afforded to it. There is usually a limited choice and it can be very cost focused on providing the cheapest tea bag available. Also, not enough theatre is created around tea.

### What should restaurants consider in order to deliver a 'proper brew'?

We have always had a pride and passion in doing things properly and this is easy to replicate for restaurants. A focus on delivering great taste and quality of product should be at the forefront of mind in a restaurant and, even if this means that you have to pay 1p or 2p more for a bag, then this is a worthwhile added cost.

### What in your view sets Yorkshire Tea apart from other brands?

Consistent quality, a premium-tasting black tea blend and the variety in having a blend for soft water, hard water, decaf and a gold blend, which is chosen from the 10 best tea gardens in the world. We are also committed to making a real difference and doing things properly. We are confident that our blends are of a high quality and will be enjoyed by all consumers and customers alike. We continue to invest significantly in the brand and our CSR agenda ensures that we re-invest a lot back into the plantations we use.

### Any recent products to the market?

We have been focusing on speciality tea more in the past two years and our partnership with Kew Gardens on our fruit and herbal and green tea ranges are proving to be extremely popular. There is a combined credibility that exists between the two companies. Kew have been able to use their botanical knowledge and we have coupled this with our blending experience to create a product that not only looks good but delivers on taste. Our sweet rhubarb blend is extremely popular and has obvious connections back to our Yorkshire roots as well.

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Hirsutes you sir: bearded hipster baristas are here to stay

have the palate for bitter flavours," says Vasili. "With Chemex or V60, you eliminate most bitter tones and you're left with fruity, bold, sweeter flavours. That's something the chains can't do for a number of reasons, mainly because the best way to do filter coffee is to use single origin. It's not cost effective for them to start producing huge quantities of roasted beans from one source because of the seasonality, and it starts getting complicated because each crop will have a slightly different flavour profile as well."

Larger coffee chains tend to go for blends for a more consistent product, which allows for adapting the taste according to fluctuation between seasons. For Vasili though, the variety offered by a single blend could be seen as an advantage for smaller businesses.

"The problem with chains - a strength or a weakness, depending on how you look at it - is that if you ask for an Americano or a cappuccino, you'll get the same drink in any of the branches and it's consistent," says Vasili. "With an independent, you don't know quite what you'll get. There's a big difference between our coffee and Starbucks - each brewing method gives a completely different flavour profile."

Gibson of Grindsmith agrees that filter coffees give a much wider, more easily detectable flavour than espresso-based coffees, making them an obvious choice for restaurants who want to offer a distinguished product. "The flavour profile of filter coffee is more like a tea than a coffee - you might get the sweetness of blueberries or the tartness of rhubarb," says Gibson. "You're taking out more sediment from the coffee that's going to block your taste receptors so you can identify really subtle flavours, like fruits, sweets, sour notes, chocolate, caramel and honey."

Filter coffee has a somewhat chequered history in the restaurant business because it was traditionally brewed and then left to hang around for extended periods of time resulting in a very poor product in most cases. But when made freshly it's a great option for many restaurants, with the added bonus that it requires much lower investment than a

traditional espresso machine.

Restaurants that want to offer distinguished quality coffee may even consider sourcing a coffee with a lower caffeine content. "Coffees with reduced caffeine content are sweeter so we use those to really bring out the subtleties and unique flavours that you'd never taste in an Americano or a latte," says Gibson.

Another area where restaurants and chains can learn from the independents is milk - not just by providing super-skinny, soya and endless nut varieties, but by focusing more energy on temperature for improved taste. "Coffee should be at drinking temperature as it's served," says Gibson. "That's an easy thing to beat the competition with - milk is often super-heated, which burns it and makes it thin and bitter."

While the popularity of newfangled milks is increasing by the day, restaurants needn't invest in too many varieties for dairy-free customers. Grind & Co offers a regular, a skinny and a soya milk, and is looking for a quality almond variety. Both Grind & Co and Grindsmith favour Bonsoy soya milk, which Gibson says is incredibly expensive, but produces the best soya-based drink he's tried.

With coffee geeks an increasingly common breed, baristas and waiting staff need to find time to unravel the wants and needs of the customer to understand knowledge levels, says Gibson. "One simple line is 'do you put milk in your coffee?' If they look at you and scowl as if to say 'that's blasphemy' then you know what line to go down. Starbucks do a macchiato that's as big as our latte and has syrup in it, so when people ask us for a macchiato we've got to judge whether they want that or a traditional one - a double espresso with a dollop of foamed milk."

While Londoners are fairly au fait with new styles and varieties of coffee, some cities are only just starting to catch on to a culture beyond the Costa cappuccino. Melbourne-born Travis Drever, owner of Mr Wolfe in Brighton, says the UK will take time to get into step with Australia. "Because we're independent, we're more of a destination coffee place so many come to us with a bit more of an understanding about coffee," says Drever. "It's really changed in the UK and it's only been about five years. In Melbourne it's been going on for about 20 years."

Restaurants can also take inspiration from coffee geeks without turning into independent coffee shops. Examples include chef James Lowe's Lyle's in Shoreditch, which has invested heavily to emulate an independent coffee bar offering to match the effort put into the restaurant and food. Lyle's also has 'coffee cupping' sessions, similar to wine tastings. Increasingly it's worth investing in good quality coffee as consumers come to expect more from their post-meal brew.

"People have just been exposed more to good coffee," says Abrahamovitch. "It's great when you see people having proper coffee for the first time and they have that eureka moment where they realise the cup they've been drinking every day is just rubbish." ■



## THE INSIDER

Howard Barwick  
Coffee programme manager UK,  
Bewley's

### What new developments in coffee sourcing should buyers be aware of?

There is definitely a move towards customers (restaurants, coffee shops and ultimately consumers) asking for greater provenance. This is something we take seriously and will visit current and prospective producers to make sure we are happy to do business with them. Although we carry a lot of certified coffees (Fairtrade, Rainforest, organic), it's important to go further and secure producer relationships.

### How should restaurants communicate the provenance of their coffee?

First make sure the coffee has a traceable provenance and that it is genuinely sustainable. Coffees that are cheaper, or just contain generic information are not worth 'back filling' a story into. Use certifications as a starting point, then look at a roaster's commitment to full traceability and best practice at all stages, including environmentally in the country of roasting. Communication of sustainability should reflect the actual practice.

### Does the coffee's provenance/type dictate the intensity of the roast or is it more down to customer preference?

The 'type' or varietal, along with a multitude of environmental factors, particularly altitude, then processing and age all have an influence on the roast required to achieve a certain result. What that roasts is - ie, lighter, darker or quicker, longer and type of temperature curve or profile - are down to the philosophy of the roasters, and whether they feel the need to roast differently for espresso or filter brewing. For example, there may well be some benefit to a slightly extended roast time and a particular temperature curve for some espresso blends or a coffee that will be used primarily as espresso, but this does not necessarily mean roasting 'darker'. Lighter roasts are to the forefront of speciality coffee, because they can show the subtleties of a great coffee. I'm a big fan of this, up to the point where the coffee has actually been fully developed in the roast.

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