

SPECIALITY

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GROWING COFFEE
COFFEE ROASTING
MAKING COFFEE
THE COFFEE BUSINESS
DRINKING COFFEE

PHOTOS BY WIM KEMPENAERS

COFFEE

 | LANNOO



WHAT IS SPECIALITY COFFEE?

When I wrote the first version of this book in 2014, we asked ourselves the question. What is coffee? Five years later, coffee has experienced an enormous evolution. The most visible part of this evolution is undoubtedly the number of coffee bars that have been opened everywhere during recent years – and not just in big cities but in other areas too. Coffee drinkers today have numerous options. Whether you want to drink it in your home, office, coffee bars, restaurants, lunch spots, etc., there are a variety of different brands, brewing methods and types of coffee available. The number of coffee training courses and barista workshops, and the continuous demand from consumers for more workshops, shows us that coffee drinkers are making increasingly informed choices about the type of coffee they prefer. We all now know that coffee does not have to be black, bitter and piping hot, and that brewing good coffee requires some knowledge and interest, and perhaps a little passion. So the question we ask ourselves today is no longer simply: ‘What is coffee?’. Nowadays, we go one step further and ask: ‘What is a speciality coffee?’. Because that is the term we pioneers use to try and make a clear difference between the regular types and the type of coffee that we will talk about in this book.

FORE

The question is simple. The answer is not.

The reply will differ depending on whom you ask. Just as with all niche markets, you need pioneers. Pioneers are never – I stress: NEVER – working with profit as their only goal. That is simply not possible, because pioneers are characteristically people who do not follow the trodden path but seek out new ones and map them out for themselves. Obviously, everyone watches them closely, including people in the established industry. And once they notice that a micro trend is gaining interest and growing into a consumer trend, they join in too. From one point of view, this can be a positive evolution, because something that is initially a niche product can then become democratized and available to a larger group. But, on the other hand, the term ‘speciality coffee’ is hijacked during this type of evolution. And that brings us back to our initial question, because without doubt we unanimously agree that not all so-called speciality coffee is actually what it says on the label.

WORD

So what is speciality coffee for me?

You will find the comprehensive answer in this book, because it deals exclusively with speciality coffee. In fact, this type of coffee involves many factors, people and links in the chain. If one of those links fails, it can directly determine whether or not the product is still really a speciality coffee. In a nutshell, you could say that speciality coffee is all about the best possible checks, insight and transparency, right from the coffee bush to your cup. This implies that it is not merely an exceptionally tasty coffee. In our view, transparency in the chain and in the pricing is just as important as the flavour of the coffee. So, the term ‘speciality coffee’ does not refer exclusively to the quality of the final cup, nor to the work of just one person, e.g. the roaster or barista. It’s always about the passionate work of a group of dedicated people who constantly strive for the best possible coffee, and have respect for every link in the chain.

GROWING

COFFEE



THE COFFEE CHAIN FROM A TO Z

Coffee derives its specific properties from nature and the human effort put into it. This perfect symbiosis produces the red coffee fruit with its kernel: the coffee bean with its unique aromas and flavours. There are many types of coffee available worldwide, but we are focusing on speciality coffee in this book – in other words top-quality coffee for which we strive for full transparency regarding its origin. Arabica and robusta are the two most common types of coffee grown for consumption. In fact, arabica coffee is of a much higher quality and far more appealing and interesting for us, which is why we will cover that type exclusively in this book.

THE COFFEE PLANT

The coffee plant belongs to the *Coffea* genus, which is part of the Rubiaceae family in botanic classification. A coffee plant produces its first, but limited, harvest after two years. Coffee bushes can reach heights of up to ten metres if they are not pruned. For ease of picking, farmers prune them to a maximum height of three metres. The flower of the coffee plant develops into a fruit, the 'coffee cherry' or 'coffee berry', which takes six to nine months to ripen. There is one main harvest per year in each coffee-growing area of the world, but the influence of humidity can make a coffee plant flower several times per year. That explains why there are fruits at different stages of maturity on a single branch and therefore not all the berries ripen, ready for picking at the same time. This leads us directly to the importance and challenge of correct harvesting. Ripe coffee fruits are usually red, shiny and firm. Immature fruits will produce a sharp and sour-flavoured coffee. Coffee made from over-ripe fruit tastes stale, over-fermented and unpleasant. So it is very important to pick the ripe berries only. Until a short time ago, people thought that there were only about seventy species. Recently, we have discovered that there are at least 120 species. Yet only two of these 120 or more species are commercialized: *Coffea arabica* (arabica) and *Coffea canephora* (robusta). There are two other types, liberica and excelsa, but they are not exported because the quality is simply not good enough.





WHAT IS A Q GRADER?

The Q Grader programme was started by the Coffee Quality Institute in 2004. Its goal was to create a globally uniform method for assessing coffees. You might say, it was set up to ensure that cuppers worldwide all speak the same language. The cupper cups/tastes the coffees and assesses them by awarding points for each category. The sum of these points then gives an overall score for the coffee out of 100. We classify one with 80 points or more as a speciality coffee from a technical point of view. This system ensures that cupping and assessing coffee are carried out objectively. The Q Grader programme comprises a six-day training course focused on olfactory and sensory training. Then the student must complete twenty tests and pass them all to acquire the certificate. He or she must renew the certificate every three years.



NOMAD BARCELONA – SPAIN

YASSER RIOS LOPEZ, 25 YEARS OLD



INTERVIEW





— **How do you see the future of speciality coffee? How do you see it evolving?**

As a roaster, I think we are still in the early stages of speciality coffee. I can see it evolving just as I see my roasting profiles improve thanks to the shared knowledge provided by the community around me. The same happens in all stages of the coffee bean. Sharing information through the community around us makes us all improve. I can see a great future for coffee where there is more integration between professionals of different fields coming together to make better coffee. I can but wonder what is going to come.

— **What do you still want to achieve in coffee?**

I want 2 things:
 – I want to grow a bigger community, and build knowledge through more professionals from different fields.
 – I want to write a book.

— **How do you plan your green coffee buying? How do you decide where to source the coffee you will buy?**

There is no secret. We find out what is available each season, we cup the samples and then we choose what we like.

— **Do you roast differently for filter and espresso? Why/why not?**

Yes, of course! Let me explain why with this example:
 Let's say we have two kinds of

apples, green Granny Smith and Red Golden. The first one has more acidity, freshness – I will 'cook' it less because I want to preserve that. On the other hand, the Red Golden I like to be very caramelized so I hold my fire and it'll be 'cooked' low and slow to caramelize as much as possible. The same happens with coffee beans: I see each for what it is worth and try to 'cook' it precisely.

— **Which brewing method would you recommend to a consumer to drink great coffee at home?**

French press. Works just like cupping. It's cheap, easy and simple. I have modified my ratio to 1:14, 4 minutes to break, 11 on the EK43 is a good point to start, 93 °C and do not press.

— **What's your opinion about competitions?**

They're great! I see them as teachers from whom I learn what to do and what not to do.

— **Organic, labels, fair trade ... what is your opinion on those?**

Organic certificate: Maybe this information is not accurate but some farmers survive on a limited budget, and yet they are organic. So I will tell them to use that for the land, for them to make little improvements rather than get a certificate.
 Fair trade: Is it really fair trade? 100% fair trade – I don't think it exists.

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SLOW COFFEE OR FILTER COFFEE

Customer: 'Good morning, I have heard that you have nice coffee. I would like a black coffee please.'

Barista: 'Great, and which coffee would you like? An espresso or a filter coffee?'

Customer: 'Filter coffee?' (Frowning) 'Oh no, I don't like that, just give me an espresso.'

This is a common and completely understandable situation, because when we talk about filter coffee today, many consumers think back to the bitter coffee that we all know from when we were growing up. Coffee that was kept standing in a Thermos jug for hours, full of caffeine, and to which we had to add milk and sugar to make it drinkable.

Fortunately, that is not the filter coffee that can be found in speciality coffee bars today. The only similarity between today's filter coffees and that coffee of the past is that they are both not made with an espresso machine. All comparisons end right there.

So what can you expect from a filter coffee today? Let me first explain what filter coffee actually is and how it differs from espresso.

SO WHAT IS FILTER COFFEE?

Are we talking about filter coffee or slow coffee? The term 'slow coffee' has developed primarily to make it clear that it is a slower form of making coffee, in contrast to espresso. And it also seemed useful to differentiate between what consumers might misconstrue from the term 'filter coffee', namely thinking it is the coffee of the past, as we described above. Nowadays, the terms 'slow coffee', 'slow brew' and 'filter coffee' all refer to the same brewing method.

Most of us grew up with filter coffee. But the rise in popularity of espresso machines led to this method being sidelined for some time. All sorts of solutions for making coffee quickly and easily have become available. Consider, for example, the pods and capsules that allow you to conjure up a cup of coffee in no time. Yet after a while, quite a few coffee drinkers found that they were no longer getting satisfaction from that way of making and drinking coffee. Thank goodness! And that is exactly why filter coffee is back in vogue more than ever. Both for coffee drinkers who expect something different and those who simply like their daily cups to be of higher quality, filter coffee is a very rewarding solution. For a small investment, say €100 at most, you can make fantastic coffee at home or in the office. So you don't necessarily have to invest in very expensive machines to make delicious coffee yourself. The only things you need are a set of scales, a coffee grinder, a filter coffee maker and, of course, good coffee beans.



**I MUST
GET UP,
MY COFFEE
NEEDS ME**

ALTERNATIVES TO COW'S MILK

Until a few years ago, most cappuccinos were made with cow's milk. Through recent times we as consumers have become increasingly aware about the sustainability of our consumption behaviour and the influence that our daily diet has on our health. The sustainability debate has entered our daily lives. We discuss climate change, biodiversity, ecological, footprint, CO₂ emissions, etc. and the whole thing gives us cause to reflect on our food chain. This is leading to many of us eating less meat, and when we do, we are more aware of what we are eating. But there is also a need to look into our consumption of cow's milk. Soya milk, a vegetable-based alternative, is one of the popular solutions to reducing consumption of cow's milk. Soya is a plant in the legume family (pulses), which means that the soybean ripens in a pod. The pod is not eaten; it is removed. We encounter soya frequently in our lives, often without being aware of it, and not only in the form of soy milk and soy sauce, etc. After all, soya is used a lot in animal feed, cookies, drinks, etc. Just as there are many species and varieties of coffee, there are also thousands of soybean varieties, each with its own application.



HOW DO YOU GET STARTED?

The most frequently asked question is: 'Aren't there already too many coffee bars open by now? Coffee bars seem to shoot up like mushrooms from the ground.' In reality, there are still far too few good coffee bars. You can indeed drink coffee on just about any corner in any city, but sadly enough it is not always the type of coffee that a true coffee lover would like to have.

So no, there is certainly not a surplus of quality coffee bars open yet. Besides that, there is as much diversity among the group of good coffee bars as there is with restaurants. If you plan to eat out tomorrow, the chances are that you are attracted to a particular area of town where you know there are several options. You don't always eat in the same restaurant. And you don't always drink coffee in the same coffee bar. All over the world different styles have emerged, ranging from popular coffee bars, mainstream bars or coffee shops combined with concept stores, to purist coffee bars with very selective offerings. In the United States there are even coffee bars that only offer 'cold brew'. As the coffee market evolves, you see how diversification occurs.

If your first question was whether or not there is still room for your coffee bar, the answer is 'YES!' BUT there is, of course, one condition, because you can't just start recklessly and have a guarantee of success. On the following pages, you will find some essential questions that you must ask yourself so you can work out the right plan that will offer a good chance of success. Apart from that, I make a number of points that were very important for me when starting up my business.





COFFEE IN A COFFEE BAR

'Where is the best place to drink my coffee?' A question that everyone probably asks themselves sometimes. Of course that depends on many different factors and there is no clear answer. Besides good coffee, service, the framework of the establishment, the barista, the atmosphere, the music and so much more are all decisive factors for a coffee bar's success. Still, there are some things that you as a consumers can pay attention to when visiting a coffee bar.

- Does the barista know his or her coffee? Can he or she explain everything about the coffee well?

- Do you have a choice of coffee of different origins?

- Is the roasting date of the coffee made clear?

- Besides and in addition to espresso, can you also drink filter coffee?

- Is the filter coffee in individual cups or in a large volume?

- Does the barista check the extraction of the shots? How about the timing?

- If there is filter coffee, is every factor correctly measured/weighed?

- Is the machine there properly clean at all times of day?

- And last but not least, is the service done in a friendly way?
