

• sip



Scott Canary in Honduras. RIGHT: (top) Caffe Driade; (below) Latte art.



The Coffee Maker

An entrepreneur's quest for the perfect cup BY ROBBY NELMS

Java, cup o' joe, or just plain coffee — no matter the moniker, millions corral the first cup of the day long before their eyes have had a chance to open. And most continue throughout their busy days. As times and tastes change, folks are foregoing supermarket-shelved brands and kicking the ubiquitous can away in favor of flavor.

Here in North Carolina, there are a number of amazing coffee roasters elevating coffee well beyond the glass carafe with the brown handle.

In the mid-90s, Scott Canary steamed to the forefront of the artisanal coffee movement, not only in North Carolina, but the United States and the world. Owner of Carrboro Coffee Company, Open Eye Café, and Caffe Driade, Canary's hands-on approach to coffee is a labor of love that comes out in every savored cup of this divine drink.

In 1998, "I'd complained enough about the availability of a good cafe in the area, so I stuck my neck out," says Canary of opening the doors of the Open Eye Café to rave reviews from caffeine-craving Carrboro and Chapel Hill residents.

The coffee world has been buzzing ever since. "I'm not a business person. We started knowing that if we were going to do it, we were going to do it right. We'd come to a question and ask how it would affect the quality, not the cost. I think that this put us on the cutting edge of the business," Canary reflects. This mantra filters down to all aspects of production, and as anyone who has walked near their doors knows, the aroma from his roasters is intoxicating.

From his first memory of drinking coffee as a child — "It was a comforting moment. I loved the bitterness instead of loading it more to the side of sweetness," he reminisces — Canary has tirelessly worked in pursuit of the perfect cup.

"It started as a love that I wanted to know everything about. But now I see it as

my job to improve the whole industry," he continues.

Nowhere is this more evident than his Direct Relationship Program. Traveling to Honduras, Guatemala, and Costa Rica (with farms in Colombia and Nicaragua coming on board soon), Canary visits individual farms and farmers where he works side-by-side to connect the chain between the farms, quality coffee, and his customers' cups.

Canary names each of his coffees after the farms or farmers where the beans originate. "That way, customers can metaphorically develop a relationship with the hands and people involved in the process," he explains. He even helps bring in farmers from abroad to complete the customer connection. "Most of the time, the farmers' first question is whether or not people like their coffee," he adds with a smile.

For Canary, it is this chain of hands that makes a great brew. "There has to be a hands-on approach to the whole process from the field to the cup," he says. "Green coffee is useless without roasting, and roasted beans are useless if not brewed correctly. Literally hundreds of hands touch



Extra Shots | Facebook and Twitter friends sound off on their favorite local coffee shops:



The Wet Whistle Co. (Archdale)
Asheville Coffee Roasters (Asheville)
Izzy's Coffee Den (Asheville)
Waking Life Hand Brewed Coffee & Espresso (Asheville)
Dripolator Coffeehouse (Black Mountain)
Dynamite Roasting Co. (Black Mountain)

Stick Boy Bread Co. (Boone and Fuquay-Varina)
Summit Coffee Co. (Davidson)
Jubala Village Coffee (Raleigh)
New World Coffee House (Raleigh)
Wildflour Bakery (Saluda)
Cup 22 Coffactory (Saxapahaw)
Krankies Coffee (Winston-Salem)

our beans before they ever get to the cup. That's what goes into a great cup of coffee."

In today's age of artisanal, farm-to-table, and locavore food movements, Canary says he sees his coffee in the same vein. Stating that his is the only artisanal roaster in Carrboro and Chapel Hill, and noting that his beans all come from the exotic regions between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn, Canary says, "It speaks to the craft of what we're doing. The local parts of it come from the roasting. All of our senses are utilized. We watch, listen, smell, and taste all aspects of the process. It is truly a handcrafted product. We really care about [our coffee], and want to mold it into the best that we can."

A testament to his efforts, accolades seem to follow Canary these days. Caffe Driade was recently featured as one of the best coffee shops in the country by *Food & Wine* magazine. He is the chairman of the Specialty Coffee Association of America, a head judge of the United States Barista

Championship, on the World Coffee Events Instructional Design and Judges Operations committees, and is a Certified World Barista Championship Head Judge — one of four and the only one from the United States. "I constantly strive to find ways to help us and our industry improve, and stay on the cutting edge of coffee — in every facet," he explains. "So, I subject myself to every certification that I can to use as a benchmark for our expertise."

In a year, Canary and his seven employees roast upwards of 75,000 pounds of coffee to the delight of his patrons at various restaurants, cafes, and businesses around the Triangle. Sure, they could do more — take more hands out of the chain, as it were. But doing so would deny Canary's purpose: "It's all about a quality cup. I want to educate our customers and have them understand the lengths we are willing to go to provide them with great coffee."

www.openeyecafe.com; www.carrborocoffee.com; www.caffedriade.com

a result. A few feet away, traffic zooms up Trade Street, none of the drivers aware that beyond the wire fence grow garlic, radishes, Swiss chard, kale, and a hive of bees.

Slade snips microgreens from a heap of rich-looking soil that lines one side of the greenhouse. These will go to a teacher whose wife will use them at her restaurant. You can see by the way he inspects the greens that this is a deep-rooted passion for Slade. When asked what his ultimate ambition is, he doesn't hesitate to say it will have just as much to do with growing ingredients as it will with cooking them.

A Cut Above

Next on the agenda is assisting in the Fundamentals of Food Service class. Students stand at tables slicing bell peppers into perfect one-eighth-inch cubes. Their knives follow a steady rhythm; their focus is unwavering. This class, like most classes at JWU, will last several hours, and these students, along with Slade, will be here until 8 p.m.

I realize how unique the college experience is for these undergrads. From start to finish, days are spent absorbing the art of preparing food — sight, sound, touch, and, of course, taste. Thinking of my own time in college, I ask Slade if he and his classmates ever take time to simply sit back and have a beer. He smiles and says, "Of course, but when we do it, we brew our own."

Intrigued, but can't commit to a full-time degree? Johnson & Wales offers a series of hands-on culinary, baking, and pastry-art classes that are open to the public and available for both adults and children. The Chef's Choice series, taught by Johnson & Wales chef instructors, ranges from instruction in general technique to lessons on a variety of particular styles of cuisine, such as Mediterranean, sushi, or Cuban. No preexisting skill set is required for these classes, which are offered on select Saturdays throughout the year and generally last about four hours. Culinary classes are \$140 per person, and baking and pastry classes are \$125 per person. All materials are provided.

For more information and to check out the spring class schedule, visit www.jwu.edu/charlotte/chefschoice.