

A place in the world cup

By Daniel Lewis, Regional Reporter
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The new face of Nimbin ... Andrew Ford, the general manager of Nimbin's Mountain Top Coffee, a brew used by this year's winner of the recent World Barista Championship.
Photo: Danielle Smith

Australia might not have retained its title at the recent World Barista Championship, but the winner from Norway used coffee beans straight from the hippie haven of Nimbin.

And in a competition where the best baristi often use exotic blends of beans from around the world, Tim Wendelboe's signature brew was straight Mountain Top Coffee from the North Coast town.

Andrew Ford, who established Mountain Top Coffee five years ago, was in Trieste in Italy for the 37-nation championship last month. "We set out to grow the Grange Hermitage of the world's coffee industry," he said, "and we would like to think we have almost achieved that." "

From virtually nothing 10 years ago, the Australian coffee industry has expanded rapidly. Most of the growth has been in the Northern Rivers region of NSW. They are the world's most southerly coffee plantations.

NSW's Regional Development Minister, David Campbell, said the state's top growers could already charge premium prices - \$9 a kilogram for beans and \$35 a kilogram for roasted products - because of the quality of their product.

Australians drink about 50,000 tonnes of coffee a year, almost all of it imported.

"This win is truly significant," Mr Campbell said of the championship. Most of the world's premium coffees are grown above 1000 metres in tropical areas, but "at just 300 metres, Mountain Top has broken with tradition".

Despite its latitude and elevation, Mr Ford said the climate and soils around Nimbin were ideal for producing quality coffee when coupled with the science Australia has used to make its wine industry a world leader.

He has 20 hectares planted, which produce 40 tonnes of beans a year. Across Australia, there is about 700 hectares of coffee. Only about 2000 hectares of the country are suitable for cultivation.

In Trieste, the Sydney coffee stalwart Instaurator (yes, he has only one name - it's Latin for one who renews or restores to a previous condition) was appointed executive director of the barista championship, which will be held next year in Seattle - the home of the Starbucks coffee chain.

"People say you can't make a good espresso out of a single estate coffee - there's not enough complexity in the flavour," Mr Instaurator said.

"What [Mr Ford] has done has blown that myth out of the water."

Australia's coffee consumption had grown over the past 20 years from about 800 grams per person each year to 2.4 kilograms as quality had improved, he said.

But too much Sydney coffee still tasted like "scalded milk poured into an ashtray".

Those who could make a great coffee can certainly do well for themselves.

Sydney barista Paul Bassett, who won the world championship title last year, now has a host of corporate sponsors and his own television series, which will air later this year.

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