

Secrets for Heavenly Espresso

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Eureka! I experienced another coffee epiphany - heaven in my espresso cup.

After traveling to Mountain Top Coffee Estate in Australia for the third time this season – before, during and after the harvest, I finally tasted some coffee expressly grown, harvested and processed for espresso.

Where to begin?

Coffee roasters, in particular those of us dedicated to espresso, always have to work in equal detail with the barista on one hand and the coffee grower on the other hand. Some of the issues to do with barista techniques have been touched on in details elsewhere. This story is about growing techniques for espresso.

There is no doubt about the fact that coffee processed by washing in comparison to “natural” or dry processed coffee produces completely different characteristics. It is well known that the body of the natural coffee is greater than the body of a washed coffee. It is even documented and quantified in some books on coffee.

Extra body is ideally suited to great espresso.

But what about other processing techniques. The semi-washed method has been tried and proven in places like Brazil and lends a little more body to the coffee, but not quite as much as a straight natural or dry-process coffee. It is a little softer and slightly thinner.

There is a fourth way of processing coffee the “washed-natural” method. Coffee educators for the most part have made it understood that “dry” and “washed” are mutually exclusive terms. But by selecting cherries that have been fully ripened and dried on the tree, often anywhere between 35-50% of a typical harvest, separating them and then soaking them to soften their skin, they can be pulped in the same way as a fully washed coffee.

The length of time taken for soaking makes a vast difference. Twelve hours is disastrous, five hours is great in the experiments we have done!

These natural “raisins” can then be dried in the normal way but they produce a completely different character due to the sugars being absorbed into the bean: like rich plum/blackcurrant juice in comparison to watery lemon/orange citrus juice. Another flavor comparison may be: matured raisins versus fresh table grapes. Brewed as an espresso it has an incredibly satisfying depth of flavor.

This particular coffee is harvested late in the season hence the mature cherry or what some people might ordinarily consider over-ripe coffee, in comparison to an early harvested fresh just ripe cherry. Neither is right or wrong but they are completely different and enjoyed on different occasions. The early harvest traditionally suits drip-filter cup better and the late harvest far better suits the body and depth of flavor essential to great espresso.

To go with this we selected a natural or traditionally dry processed coffee from the same plantation and the same crop. This plantation although being only 400 meters in altitude replicates a micro-climate of 1200-1400 meters closer to the equator due to its latitude. (28° south in latitude).

With dry-processing, a relative high grown coffee produces an espresso with body like syrup, much thicker than the “washed-natural” or semi-washed and way beyond the washed coffee from the same crop. The particular batch we tasted had a superlative rich complexity of praline/hazelnut/caramel/chocolate flavor, with sweetness and finesse but with immense body.

When the natural batches were mixed with the “washed-natural” they combined to produce the “Grange Hermitage” of espresso coffees with viscous body, rich and smooth yet complex and a lingering blissful aftertaste. A fantastic vintage. But sorry guys it is all sold already! I can't wait until next year's vintage! Stay tuned for the harvest report.

Mountain Top Coffee was used by the new World Barista Champion at Trieste Italy, Tim Wendelboe as a single origin/Estate coffee in his prize winning signature drink! Go figure – welcome to the new world of Specialty Espresso coffee.....Looks Great and Tastes Great.

Instaurator

P.S. It should be noted Instaurator played no part in the judging scores and evaluation of any competitor at Trieste! Instaurator is the newly appointed executive Director of the World barista Championship ltd.

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