



lou perri

FROM THE STUNNED MULLET

palate pleasures

COFFEE AGONY OR ECSTASY?

Double shot soy decaffe latte – very hot, not too much froth please...oh and by the way I'm in a hurry".

Phrases like these are a common catchcry in cafe/restaurants all over the place. Just a casually placed request entailing specifications required in a beverage delivered to you in a timely fashion every morning right?

An ever perpetuating hangover from Starbucks, such minutely detailed tailor-made coffee requests are mandatory in today's espresso consuming world.

There's no doubt that coffee is a beloved addiction in our society. Whether it's a couple of teaspoons of Nescafe, a trip to your favourite cafe en-route to work, or a skim flat white on your own home espresso machine – it's something that many of us actively seek out on a daily basis.

A coffee machine is often the cornerstone of the cafe/restaurant, the engine room of production – plumbed into the guts of the premises, steaming and pouring away. Like any well-oiled machine the coffee machine requires firstly- an experienced operator, regular maintenance and TLC.

To say a good barista is hard to find is an understatement, to find three if you operate varying hours, 7 days a week is an impossibility.

It is by no means difficult to make coffee on an espresso machine – once you get the hang of it. Like any other production line process it's all about learning and perfecting all the steps and repeating them over and over again.

It's usually getting the HANG of it that is the problem....

Coffee training is more often than not a lengthy and time consuming process, involving much wastage of coffee and milk.

To start training someone from scratch and getting them to the point where they can competently run a busy shift on the machine often takes months – by which time in our industry's fly-by-night employment track record, they've often moved onto a new job, or even new career.

Making coffee is also highly labour intensive. Espresso does not mean 'fast' as you may believe. It actually means 'specially made for you' - which means that each cup of milk-based coffee requires its own individual 3-step process of dosing, steaming and pouring.

In order to run a coffee machine you at least need one extra staff member. On a busy shift you may need two people – one dosing coffee shots, one steaming milk and pouring.

So it better be worth it for an operator, right? At \$3-\$4 a cup you must be joking!

Perhaps this is why our housing prices are amongst the highest in the world, we spend next to nothing on our coffees! I would like to see one other example of a tailor service with such a low capital outlay.

To serve one coffee you need to consider –

1. A dedicated state of the art machine valued at 15-25K
2. Experienced baristas – hard to come by, frustrating to train and easy to lose
3. Additional labour costs per shift of at least one, sometimes two persons.
4. An often cranky, caffeine and sleep deprived early AM clientele who demand their fix NOW, or the other end of the spectrum- those who linger in your premises sitting on the best table for 3 hours over one cup of \$3.50 weak, skim cappuccino, super hot. AND-
5. A fickle customer base with complex and varied requests involving the same beverage, with a choice of many other establishments serving the said beverage if they get one cup not to their liking at your place...

One must ponder; do we actually need to spend more time ordering a coffee than we do on say, ordering a new car? Amortise your order time over utilization of both and the capital outlay and you will be amazed at the conclusion.

Also– what other industry allows such variations to be factored into an individual product without huge additional charges? I cannot think of another instance where a base good or service is altered and tailor made for you, without a premium whacked on. And not to mention the WAIT involved for personal specifications – let's say you want your new car in a specific colour with additional safety features, that'll be another 2 months delivery time sir...

It's enough to make me need a coffee myself, or actually....perhaps something stronger!

And again - "soy decaffe, not too much froth, double shot hot and FAST".

Too many words, one coffee.....and YES, there will be a WAIT.

