

COFFEE CORNER: FESTIVAL TIME



Following my conversion to coffee, reported in a previous newsletter, I have taken a keen interest in coffee events. The biggest UK coffee event is the London Coffee Festival, held at the beginning of April at the Old Truman Brewery in Shoreditch. My daughter Cleo and I went last year and this year's festival, 7th to 10th April, was bigger still. After last year, when a half-day ticket did not give enough time to do the festival justice, we went for a whole day and even then, left without visiting all the stands that we would have liked to. The festival includes a Coffee Masters competition modelled on the World Barista Championships, lots of talks (we went to an interesting one on using Instagram), a pop-up roastery, and many, many stands – lots of roasters offering samples of espresso, filtered, pour-over or cold brew, coffee making equipment and shiny, shiny machines.

The rise and rise of cold brew coffee was more noticeable this year as was the attention now being paid to the water that we use to make coffee (50% Volvic and 50% Waitrose Essential is ideal, since you wondered). One highlight was meeting Frank Durra who, as Titus Grinding, builds state of the art grinders in Germany. Sadly they are way outside my price range but a home barista can dream.

Last November was Cup North ('a two day Northern coffee party'), held in Manchester. Cleo and I went to this for the first time having heard positive reports about it. It is on a much smaller scale than the London Coffee Festival and the focus is on beans rather than machines – although there was a 'tamper tantrum' (a series of talks), heats and the final of the national Cup Tasting Championship, and a coffee throwing competition. Sadly we missed watching contestants in three different weight classes throwing a kilo bag of coffee as far as possible according to a number of very well thought out but completely arbitrary rules. Cup North was friendly and relaxed, and roasters had more time to talk and enthuse about their coffee. One of the most impressive was Avenue Coffee from Glasgow – who were serving a filtered Rocko Mountain Reserve from Ethiopia and as an espresso, their single origin (that is, not a blend of beans), Skyscraper, a Colombian coffee from the Agustino Forest programme. Coffee festivals team up with one or more roasters to produce a festival edition. From Cup North, we came away with many bags of a delicious Rwandan Cup of Excellence coffee supporting the Gitesi Project, which helps to buy dairy cows for farmers in Gitesi.

A coffee festival is an ideal opportunity to try lots of different beans as part of that quest to find the perfect coffee, to meet knowledgeable and enthusiastic people, to drool over the latest equipment, and to explore the boundaries of one's caffeine intake. Next year: Amsterdam or Berlin?

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