

## COFFEE CONVERSION



This is an item about discovery, enthusiasm and research. All prized qualities in the Educational Psychology Group. As some of you know, I didn't drink coffee at all until nearly three years ago, when a friend encouraged me to try a *caffè corretto* on a trip to Venice. That's an espresso with grappa in it. I tried espresso by itself and realised that it is a potentially interesting, complex drink. I started making coffee at home, initially inspired by Inspector Montalbano to use a stove top (or *moka*) pot. I then got an *aeropress* (invented by the inventor of the Frisbee), which brews coffee of exceptional clarity. But neither of these can produce espresso.

I carried out some research into home espresso making that led me to *Coffee Forums UK*, an online forum for speciality coffee... well, geeks, probably, but very likeable and helpful ones. I joined the forum in April, 2014 and on Good Friday, 2014, on my way to the traditional Good Friday track cycling racing at the Lee Valley Velodrome, I detoured to a small blocks of flats in the Elephant and Castle, to pick up a second hand (much second hand) Gaggia Classic from another forum member. I had learnt that this is the best entry-level espresso machine you can get, that the version that I was buying had been modified to so that it delivers the optimal amount of pressure through the coffee grinds.

I also learnt that more important than the espresso machine is a high quality burr grinder, to ensure a fine enough grind and a regular distribution of the ground up bits of coffee bean. And, of course, I learnt that it is essential to buy fresh beans from roasters with good integrity, who roast to order. From April to around October, I practised with the Classic and a grinder (a Eureka Mignon), learning about the complex interaction of variables that come into play in producing a good shot of espresso. Weighing the beans, grinding, weighing again, carefully distributing the grinds in a portafilter basket, tamping, and timing the shot.

At the time, a year ago, I had no idea that I was getting on to a slippery slope. I had no idea that making coffee would become a consuming passion and that it was something that I wanted to get better at. So, in pursuit of improvement and through the coffee forum I sold my Classic and got a traditional lever machine (a very satisfying process: you pull down a lever to set up the cycle that forces the water through the grinds) and improved my grinder.

Research of course, extends beyond the coffee forum and it is something that I am sharing with my daughter. We went to the London Coffee Festival together at the end of April. We have attended a couple of courses on making coffee (one in London, organised by the Department of Coffee and Social Affairs, one in Bristol at Extract Coffee Roasters), a course on cupping (tasting different coffees) at Ozone

(by Old Street Station), and I went on a day organised by the forum at Has Bean roasters in Staffordshire. I have also discovered a degree of friendliness, enthusiasm and willingness to share knowledge in speciality coffee shops that I had not imagined. I have drunk some amazing coffee, made from some amazing beans by amazingly skilful baristas who clearly love what they do. Talking of drinking coffee and of more immediate interest to anyone studying in, working in or visiting UCL there are three wonderful, speciality coffee shops all within minutes of Bedford Way: The Espresso Room, Store Street Espresso and its sibling, Continental Stores and a fourth, Caravan, not far away and behind Kings Cross station (which is where my aeropress recipe comes from). So, yes, I am a coffee convert.

*Phil Stringer*

## References

Research hub: Coffee Forums UK

<http://coffeeforums.co.uk/content.php>

Educational experiences

<http://departmentofcoffee.com>

<http://extractcoffee.co.uk>

<http://www.hasbean.co.uk>

<http://www.ozoncoffee.co.uk>

Conferences (of sorts)

<http://www.londoncoffeefestival.com>

Local coffee shops

<http://www.theespressoroom.com/#homepage>

<http://www.storetespresso.co.uk>

<http://www.caravankingscross.co.uk>

