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COFFEE TALK: A Look at What's Brewing Behind the Bar

| BY ELYSE GLICKMAN | When the holiday season rolls around, the appeal of hot cocktails and dessert-y drinks starts brewing — and that includes spirited beverages crafted with coffee. In fact, whether it's hot or cold, coffee is becoming a popular ingredient on cocktail menus.

But does it make sense to create libations featuring the mighty bean in Mexican and Latin restaurants — the domain of Margaritas, Palomas, Mojitos, and Caipirinhas?

Considering some of the world's finest coffees are sourced from Latin America,

it makes perfect sense to brew up coffee cocktails that will generate a buzz at your bar not only this winter but all year through.

THE COFFEE-SPIRITS CONNECTION

With the myriad liquors that pair well with coffee, you might wonder if the kind of brew used to create cocktails really matters.

Experts say yes. And they caution against reaching for just any kind of *café*, because the right beans, grinds and roasts can make all the difference.

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—RYAN CASTELAZ, *Discourse*

is a ‘one-size-fits-all’ affair — but it shouldn’t be,” explains Ryan Castelaz, a barista, bartender and founder of Discourse, a company that operates pop-up coffee bars and private coffee events in and around Milwaukee, Wisconsin. “When coffee is referenced in most recipes outside of the craft coffee space, the ingredient called for is often listed just as ‘coffee,’ as if all coffee is created and brewed equal.”

Not all tequilas, mezcals and rums are created equal, after all; the same goes for coffee.

“The correct coffee or coffees can have an enormous impact on the profile of your drink,” Castelaz says. “While many coffees from a region or country may share similar characteristics, coffee, like wine, is largely a product of terroir. A high-altitude Colombian coffee will likely be crisp and clean with notes of citrus and flowers, while a lower altitude coffee may exhibit more caramel and toffee. When customers ask, I tell them I look for five primary things when I

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source coffee for drinks: freshness, origin, varietal, processing, and roast. Each of these five elements contributes greatly to the overall flavor profile of the coffee and determines the direction the drink will take."

The bold, round flavors and medium-coarse grind of coffee from Chiapas "make a perfect mate for the robust, smokey character of a true mezcal," says Castelaz, who uses Mexico Oaxaca or Chiapas espresso plus joven mezcal, simple syrup, fresh lime juice and saline solution in his Caffe Corretto.

For "gently sweet and quite refined" Peruvian Pisco (which, like brandy, is distilled from wine grapes), the clean florals of a high-altitude, medium-fine ground Peruvian coffee make a perfect pairing, he explains. His Darkest Peru made with Peruvian Pisco, Nitro Chicha Morada, Sous



Vide Peruvian Coffee, and Smoked + Oaked Vanilla is one example of such a pairing.

For whiskey, Castelaz favors "the nutty, rich, sweet flavor of Brazil Minas Gerais.

"Maximize your extraction by grinding fine to coax out as much sweet, rich nuttiness as you can, and complement with either a bourbon or a spicy rye whiskey," he suggests.

Rum Agricole, with its dark chocolate and orange notes, works well when steeped on coarsely ground Guatemala Huehuetenango, then served on the rocks or in "funky tiki concoctions," he adds, while gin pairs with the fruity, floral, citrus-y notes of a coarse-grind Colombia Cauca.

Brewing Tips for Coffee Cocktails

Jamie Hickey, a barista certified by the Specialty Coffee Association and a bartender, shares insights on some of the most common mistakes mixologists make when brewing up recipes for coffee cocktails.

- **ADDING TOO MUCH COFFEE TO THE MIX.** "This masks the flavor of other ingredients while also giving it an off-taste," Hickey says. "When choosing a good coffee for your cocktail, know how strong you want it to taste and measure appropriate amounts."
- **USING INSTANT COFFEE.** "Don't use instant coffee because the flavor will be different," Hickey says. "Instant tastes more like cocoa powder or chocolate syrup than brewed beans!"
- **MIXING HOT BREWED COFFEE INSTEAD OF ICED COFFEE.** According to Hickey, this usually results in a warmer texture and less complexity. "It's best to use cold-brewed iced coffee instead," she advises.
- **COOKING DOWN TOO MUCH LIQUID OFF THE ESPRESSO MIXTURE BEFORE ADDING IT BACK INTO THE MIXER FOR MORE DILUTION.** "This can darken your cocktail and make it burn hotter," Hickey explains.
- **FORGETTING ABOUT CREAMERS.** "They are perfect for balancing out any sour or bitter flavors of cortado or coffees with the vanilla notes found in many [coffees] nowadays," she says.

RESTAURANT MIXOLOGISTS WEIGH IN

Understanding beans, grinds and roasts is important, of course. But how are mixologists on the front lines at Latin-themed restaurants incorporating that coffee education into the cocktails they're crafting?

"I have been developing new coffee cocktails and leaning into some of the fruit flavor profiles you find in coffee," explains Lynnette Marrero, bar manager at New York City-based Peruvian restaurant Llama Inn. "I did some work with Peruvian coffee this past summer and paired it with Lucuma, a very traditional fruit in Peru and Latin America. In the past, I made some cocktails that are riffs on classic espresso martinis. I also like to pair coffee and sherry, which is a great combination."

One example is the Cafe Noir Marrero created using sherry, coconut liqueur, white rum-infused coffee, rum, and a flamed orange twist.

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Chileno Bay Resort's COMAL Espresso Martini

Luigi Bezzera, bartender at Maui Miami, suggests trying cold brew as a way to update an espresso martini. The Classic Espresso Martini at Maui Miami, for example, includes chilled coffee or espresso plus rum or bourbon, Tia Maria and Fernet Branca.

"Technically, you can make espresso with any coffee...I recommend infusing rum with coffee or using Van Gogh Double Espresso Vodka, but you can also use bourbon as a replacement if the customer prefers brown spirits," he says. "Creme de Cacao and Patron XO, of course, you could use as a variant. Either way, the coffee will chill down when mixed."

The Baja-focused food menu at El Molino at the Chileno Bay Resort & Residenc-

es in Los Cabos, Mexico inspired beverage manager Osvaldo Vasquez to create the COMAL Espresso Martini just before the holiday season. The cocktail — which he introduced at the resort's El Molino Coffee Shop and will add to the menu at the fine-dining COMAL — features a Chiapas coffee base along with Nixta Liqueur, an ancestral corn liqueur from Jilotepec, Mexico, and Aztec Ruda Bitters for a distinctive regional flavor. According to Vasquez, it's his rendition of the popular Baja Carajillo Cocktail — a popular coffee libation typically made with Licor 43.

Danielle Espindola, head mixologist at New York City's Berimbau Brazilian Kitchen, says her first concern is keeping the cocktail bold, yet balanced, and not

overpowered by coffee or any other ingredients.

"At Berimbau, we use Nueva York Coffee, a locally roasted New York brand with Brazilian, Peruvian and Ethiopian coffees called 'La Mezcla,'" she says. "We grind it in-house, bringing out those great flavors which work in our current Café-rinha."

That beverage — popular year-round as a dessert option and a brunch cocktail — features aged Cachaça, coffee liqueur, simple syrup and freshly brewed espresso.

"We already had an earlier iteration of the Café-rinha, which was served on the rocks, so I used that base and just gave it a little update, turning it into a twist on the classic espresso martini," Espindola says. "With the spirit element, I like aged Cachaça. It's a spirit full of flavors, and while it is not so simple to work with, the result is great as aged Cachaça is sweeter and imparts a hint of cinnamon and caramel on the palate."

Marrero also leans toward very flavorful coffees behind the bar.

"I look for a coffee that has a lot of flavor...deep rich coffee notes to stand up in the cocktail," says Marrero. "Using subpar coffee or making the infusion too weak are common mistakes. The flavor needs to come through in the cocktail."

Jamie Hickey — a barista certified by the Specialty Coffee Association, high-end steakhouse bartender, and founder of Coffee Semantics (a company that performs product reviews and teaches brewing techniques) — has observed that some bartenders believe more flavorful coffees will overpower or become lost in a cocktail. She disagrees.

"While some blends are very strong and slightly acidic, they lend their wonderful flavor to the drink," Hickey says. "The roast is another important decision when developing a new recipe or tweaking one slightly. Less roasted beans will yield smoother drinks while more roasted beans will create bitter flavors, which some customers find irresistible!"

Espindola and Bezzera also offer some preparation tips for anyone planning to add coffee cocktails to the bar menu.

Pre-brewing espresso shots instead of making them by order is one practice Espindola frowns upon.

"Coffee, in general, goes bitter after brewed and kept heated for a while, espresso even more. That causes a bad aftertaste, and we can feel that even when mixed in a drink," she warns. "Another big mistake is not shaking enough or over-shaking the cocktail. That will change the aesthetic of the foam. A beautiful foam is made, without any cream, when the mix is given the right amount of air and energy."

Bezzera also offers some common-sense advice founded in science:

"Hot coffee in a shaker tin will explode," he says emphatically. "I like the idea of a finished cocktail with egg-white variant, but you would have to make sure the coffee is cold, or it'll cook the eggs."

Elyse Glickman is the At the Bar columnist for *el Restaurante*.

Find cocktail recipes for Darkest Peru, Caffe Corretto, The Classic Espresso Martini Recipe, Cafe Noir, and Café-rinha at elrestaurante.com.



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Café-rinha

November 19, 2021

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Recipe by Danielle Espindola, *Berimbau Brazilian Kitchen*, New York, New York

1½ oz. aged Cachaça
½ oz. coffee liqueur
½ oz. simple syrup
1 oz. freshly brewed espresso.

Build all ingredients in a shaker and add ice. Shake hard for 30 seconds. Double strain into a coupe glass. Garnish with 3 coffee grains and a dust of cinnamon.

The Classic Espresso Martini Recipe

November 19, 2021

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Recipe by Luigi Bezzera, *Maú Miami*, Miami, Florida

2 oz. of your choice of rum or bourbon
½ oz. Tia Maria
½ oz. Fernet Branca
1 oz. of chilled coffee or espresso
Shake and strain; pour; enjoy!

Note: When working with rum or bourbon, consider a 2:1 ratio (2 oz. of primary liquor to 1 oz. of coffee). If using hot coffee or espresso, add that last; then shake and strain."

Cafe Noir

November 19, 2021

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Recipe by Lynnette Marrero, *Llama Inn*, New York, New York

1 oz. Oloroso Sherry
½ oz. Kalani Coconut Liqueur
½ oz. Coffee infused white Rum
1½ oz. Zacapa 23 Rum
Flamed Orange Twist

The Darkest Peru

November 19, 2021

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Recipe by Ryan Castelaz, *Discourse Coffee*, Milwaukee, WI

2 oz. Peruvian Pisco
4 oz. Nitro Chicha Morada (recipe below)
1½ oz. Sous Vide Peruvian Coffee (recipe below)
½ oz. Smoked + Oaked Vanilla

Add the Nitro Chicha Morada to a highball glass and fill ½ full with ice. Combine the Pisco, Sous Vide Peruvian Coffee, and Smoked + Oaked Vanilla in a shaker tin, then fill with ice and hard shake for 10-15 seconds. Strain onto the Chicha Morada, and garnish with a few pieces of purple corn and a flaming cinnamon stick. Serve with a straw for the guest to incorporate the layers before enjoying.

The Sous Vide Peruvian Coffee:

10 oz. Peruvian Coffee, ground medium-coarse
10 oz. 202°F filtered water
½ gal. cold filtered water

In a sous vide bag, hot bloom the Peruvian Coffee grounds with 202°F filtered water, assuring that all grounds are equally saturated. Add cold filtered water, remove as much air as possible, and seal. Sous vide for 12 to 16 hours at 145°F, strain and reserve.

Caffe Corretto

November 19, 2021

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Recipe by Ryan Castelaz, *Discourse Coffee*, Milwaukee, WI

1 shot of Mexico Oaxaca or Chiapas Espresso
½ oz. Joven Mezcal
1 oz. simple syrup (1:1)
¼ oz. fresh lime juice
5 drops saline solution (recipe below)

Combine all ingredients in a shaker tin, then fill with ice and hard shake for 10-15 seconds. Strain into a coupe or rick and nora glass. Serve with a lime wheel.

The Saline Solution:

3½ oz. filtered water
½ oz. Kosher salt

Dissolve the salt in the water and reserve in a dropper bottle.

COMAL Espresso Martini

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Osvaldo Vasquez, *Chileno Bay Resort & Residences*, Los Cabos, Mexico

1½ oz. vodka
1 oz. Nixta Liqueur
2 dashes Aztec Ruda Bitters
1 espresso coffee shot from Chiapas Mexico "CAFEOLOGO"

Add all the ingredients in the shaker and shake well for 20 seconds. Use a double filter to strain into a martini glass. Garnish with coffee beans and sprinkle Aztec Ruda Bitters on top.

The Nitro Chicha Morada:

3½ oz. strawberry tops
3½ oz. sliced strawberries
3½ c. filtered water
3½ oz. ice
4 oz. purple corn concentrate
4 oz. pineapple juice
1½ oz. honey
1 lime, juiced
12 drops rosewater

Steep the strawberries and strawberry tops in filtered water just off a boil for ten minutes. Strain the tea off of the strawberries and add ice to quickly chill. Incorporate the strawberry tea with purple corn concentrate, pineapple juice, honey, lime juice, and rose water. Place in an iSi whipper and charge with 1 charge of Nitrogen, reserve remaining.