

Tips on perfecting
SINGLE-CUP BREWING
and passing on the passion
to customers

**CURRENT
OFFERING**

• NICARAGUA JIN
LEMON ZEST, CAS

• BRAZIL PEABERRY
HAZELNUT, PLUM

• ETHIOPIA SIDAMO
VANILLA, MELON

• BEAUMONT B
dark chocolate

• COWBOY BLEND
cacao nibs,

• DECAF BLEND
marshmallow,

MANUAL TRANSMISSION

By Holly Bastin

PT's Coffee in 2000 looked quite a bit different than it does now. When I started, we served exclusively batch-brewed coffee, poured into airpots. Today, the newest PT's location in Topeka, Kan.—which opened in 2011—serves exclusively single-cup coffee. We use pour-over, French press and more to handcraft every drink that goes out the door, allowing customers to connect with each cup at a significantly deeper level than in the past.

The shift from batch brewing to by-the-cup is one of the most exciting developments in our industry. But incorporating a single-cup program may not be the right choice for every retailer—actual execution isn't as simple as setting a brew bar on your counter and pulling the trigger. Changing from batch brew to single cup requires an adjustment process for everyone involved on the café side, as well as a shift of expectations from the customer. Let's evaluate single cup from each perspective of a café business while keeping the customer experience in mind:

PERSPECTIVE #1: THE OWNER

The owner's best move when deciding whether or not to move toward single cup is to crunch some numbers and then decide if the change makes monetary sense.

One of the biggest financial impacts to account for is labor. Whether you are adding a little bit of manual brew to your offerings or planning to switch to it entirely, your biggest expense will be time. Brewing a batch of coffee takes the barista a few minutes and results in dozens of cups. With single cup, on the other hand, you're likely looking at about two minutes per cup. It's a considerable labor increase, meaning you'll potentially need to add staff.

While hiring more baristas can put an owner on edge, there are some ways to minimize the added costs. If you're in the position of owner/operator, you can act as the additional person needed on bar. Or, if you employ a salaried manager, you can help that person come up with a strategy to use his or her time to better buffer additional payroll. With a study of hourly

sales and a little creativity, all sorts of schedule solutions can present themselves.

Price is another financial consideration for single cup. You can often charge more for coffees made to order than you can for brews coming out of an airpot. When buying coffee green from an importer or farmer, different lots of coffee will come in at different prices. Offering single-cup brewing makes it much easier to charge according to what you paid for the coffee, an idea that's

similar to what we see with by-the-glass wine at restaurants. At the same time, you'll be teaching consumers that, yes, different coffees are sold at varying prices to roasters.

Once you know the cost of your coffee dose, filter, cup, lid and sleeve, you can project to a fair margin, creating space in your asking price to account for the labor cost increase. And remember, one of the most financially beneficial aspects of manual brew is that waste is virtually eliminated.

The owner should also, of course, consider customer opinion when weighing the single-cup move—without those dedicated patrons, the shop would not exist. Customers' perceptions of manual brew will vary depending on their familiarity with the process, and if they're unclear on the single-cup concept, they may be hesitant to accept the change. If you decide to make the switch, give your existing customers the heads up and have all staff prepared to highlight the benefits that come with by-the-cup service.

A few open demonstrations and tastings will help too, especially if you compare batch brew and manual side by side.

PERSPECTIVE #2: THE MANAGER

As a manager, the areas of operations, systemization and training are of particular concern. When incorporating manual brew—whether you transition to it slowly or do a clean switch overnight—equipment selection and placement are key factors in streamlining the process. Decisions can be based on many variables, but the two that come to the forefront are quality of the cup



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and efficiency of the brewing process. Finding a way to tackle both issues with consistency should be your top goal.

Let's start with equipment—and all the pros and cons they carry. Drippers come in all shapes, sizes and materials. Kettles, grinders, coffee-portioning tools, hot water sources and scales also come into play. There really is no one “right” way to put together your setup. My best suggestion is to investigate what has worked for others by checking out the many resources, guides and videos online. Get a sense of what you might like and then test out your hunches. Look for a simple, consistent and delicious result. Once you know what you want, I recommend installing it on the front counter where customers can easily observe their coffee being made. Also, make sure there's space so that accessories, equipment and wares are within arms' reach of the baristas. Strategic placement of tools is perhaps the best way to speed up the process.

As previously mentioned, adding manual brew means taking on labor costs, and each staff member will require additional training and practice time to execute the new program. I find it's best when teaching manual brewing to give baristas instructions that are easy to follow and repeat. It also helps to have a clearly written guide of specifications handy. The only way to get better and faster at anything is to do it over and over, so organize plenty of time to practice before launching your program. Your customers will be happy you did.

PERSPECTIVE #3: THE BARISTA

The barista is the link in the chain that will make or break the customer experience. The barista's role in single-cup brewing is a balancing act, dealing with both the preparation of the product and timely delivery to customers. If customers are only used to airpots, they may not have the sense of coffee patience a single-cup program requires. How do you bridge the gap between their expectations and their new reality?

First, remember that customers' feelings can vary based on something as simple as the time of day. People might find manual

brew intriguing when they're running a few errands mid-afternoon but find the extra two minutes of waiting can be frustrating first thing in the morning. When I consider my own point of view as a café customer, I definitely value a good cup of coffee. But my overriding concern is being united with “my precious” in a timely manner so I can go about the rest of my day and be on schedule. While not every morning customer is in a hurry, it's



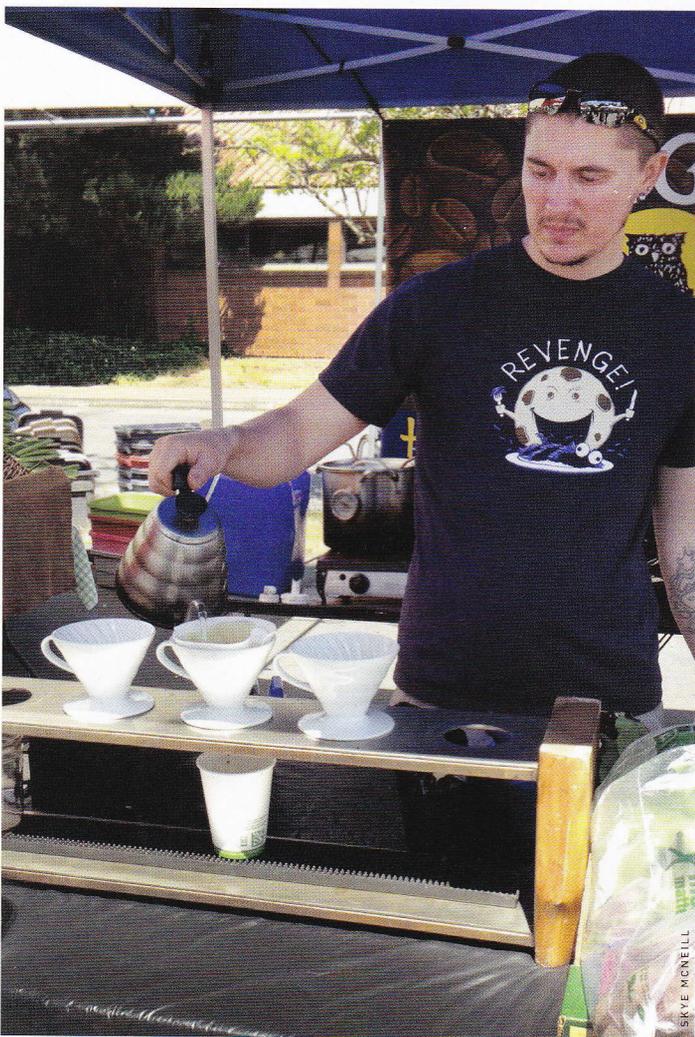
NICOLE O'BRIEN

best to assume that a good deal of them are. And nothing makes a perfectly executed brew taste less awesome than waiting an unexpected 10 minutes for it to get into your hands.

One of our baristas at PT's recently told me that in his view, 40 percent of the manual brew service experience is actually making the coffee and 60 percent of it is engaging with the customer. He says he works hard to connect with the customer as the drink is prepared. Quality remains paramount, but the brewing process is staged in a manner that allows for frequent eye contact and conversation. This grabs the customer's attention, and he or

she becomes focused on the human interaction and coffee facts instead of worrying about the seconds ticking away.

Asking the barista to focus on anything other than making great coffee may seem to go against our modern specialty sensibilities. But I'm not suggesting we lessen the importance of technique and attention to detail. What the 60-40 ratio is meant to emphasize is effort and investment. Passion for coffee and the process is great, but the effort put toward connecting with the customer should be given even more attention. The barista's role is to ease the entire process, remembering that customer service is mostly about reading people and making them feel good. A customer's choice to return to your establishment will likely have more to do with their overall experience than the flavor in the cup.



BRINGING IT HOME

With more consumers caring about the details of their food and drink, single-cup brewing is well-suited to grab attention and praise. It's an effective tool to showcase the taste of your coffee and convey what's special about it to your customers. With the owner, manager and barista on the same page, your shop can implement a stunning single-cup program that ideally will result in an enthusiastic pool of return customers. ☞

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