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On The Table #14

Engineered Mediocrity Part II - Test Results ([Part I](#))

Dear cyber reader, You have worked hard on your espresso program, carefully refining your control of each factor affecting your coffee. You have a fine blend and use it within ten days after roasting. You faithfully change grinder burrs and control grinder heat. The staff are packing perfectly and honoring the Italian brewing standards of a slow and short pour. Your water pressure and mineral content are controlled and you keep your machines very clean. Then why is your espresso still inconsistent? Some shots are lighter in color than others and not as sweet?

The answer is that the brewing water temperature of your espresso machine is changing as you make your coffee.

Making a truly sweet caffè espresso is analogous to balancing a ball on the tip of your finger. When the ball is balanced (all interrelated factors affecting your espresso are controlled) a tiny movement of your finger tip, (a change in one of the factors) will cause the ball to fall off, (create a bitter espresso). After the ball has fallen, you can wiggle your finger all you want and it will not affect the ball. It is not until all the factors are balanced to perfection that you can detect the effect of one factor, in this case brewing water temperature.

For the last ten years we have worked hard to "balance the ball" at two high volume espresso stores in Seattle. And, brewing water temperature is the factor we cannot control, it is built into the espresso machine by the engineers.

Different coffee blends may have slightly different ideal brewing water temperatures. I have never handled a coffee that, when roasted to a deep mahogany brown with no oils on the surface, did not peak in sweetness between 203 and 204 degrees F.. Both my blends feature an absurdly thick red-brown crema, and an aggressive sweetness when I hold my brewing water temperature to 203.5 degrees, plus or minus 2/10ths of a degree.

The range of error that you can taste (provided all the factors are in your control, i.e., the ball is balanced) is 1/2 of a degree F. The temperature variation which completely ruins the espresso, creating a sour bitter flavor (if temperature is low), or a bland/bitter flavor (if the temperature is too high), is three degrees . The best machines you can buy offer a range of error no better than five degrees. Thus, inconsistent coffee is enforced by this error.

What Can You Do?

Raise your voice. Let your equipment representative know that you are interested in better thermal stability. Espresso machine companies in a competitive market will respond to customer concerns to make their excellent machines closer to perfect.

Ciao for now!

END

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