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## **On The Table #20**

### **Espresso Preparation for Restaurants, Caterers, and Hotels—What is Best for You?**

**Dear cyber reader, The reality in a restaurant is that the waiters or bartenders rush to make espresso or cappuccino when it is requested by a customer.**

**There is no way the chef can turn his or her attention to the coffee, it is just not possible. Waiters and bartenders turn over too quickly to be trained to pull fine espresso, and are often themselves too busy even if they were career people in the restaurant.**

**The situation is roughly the same for many caterers, and hotels seeking to prepare fine espresso for an increasingly sophisticated customer base. To prepare the finest possible espresso, it is the realm of a highly trained espresso specialist using the finest commercial equipment.**

**In Italy where cultural and economic conditions facilitate training the bartenders to be experts in caffè espresso, we still see mixed results as far as overall quality of prepared coffee and cappuccino. The legend of the artistic barista is mostly...well, legend.**

**In much of Europe this is not a new problem. And, two basic approaches have surfaced to address the problem.**

#### **Pods vs Super-Automatic Machines**

**Pods machines are designed to eliminate the need to grind and pack for each espresso ordered. They are pre-ground, packaged in permeable paper not unlike tea-bags and sold in tins bearing some arty logo. In my opinion, you can not sacrifice freshness of the bean. The coffee within the pods I have seen is always stale, so they are not going to please the discriminating customer.**

**That leaves us with super-automatic machines. Here defined as machines that grind and pack per order using fresh coffee in**

whole bean form, extract the shot according to infinitely variable brewing programming choices, and clean themselves with no complaining. Hey-I'm there.

The reasons to go super-automatic rather than have an untrained staff member prepare espresso manually are the following:

**Coffee Quality**—Always number one with Vivace. Any mistake the barista makes creates a bitter espresso, and only perfect control of all brewing factors creates perfection in the cup. The great strength of super-automatic machines is that they grind fresh per order. The super-automatics I have programmed have made espresso that is rich, and free of bitterness, but lacking the sweetness that is the mark of the finest Northern Italian style espresso. They lack the sweetness mainly due to fluctuating brewing water temperature. And, as you know if you have read my stuff, most commercial machines suffer from this problem as well.

**The bottom line?**...properly programmed by the roaster, these machines can make damn good espresso coffee. Your customers will be very pleased.

**Note:** The machine I tested the most extensively , the Cafina C-6 offers very flexible brewing parameter programming. I was able to program brewing water temperature, brewing pressure, elapsed time and volume for the shot, and even set a regular cleaning schedule the machine would adhere to. This quality assures that the machine can be shipped to your restaurant making shots to the roasters specifications. That is a very valuable feature from this roaster's point of view.

**No Mess**—All the coffee is ground internally, no knock box, no splatter, no coffee grounds everywhere.

**No Waste**—The machines grind per order, and tamp internally. eliminating coffee grounds spilling over the edge of the porta-filter that is part of a manual process.

**Self Cleaning**—With the push of a button the brewing surfaces are cleaned automatically. It takes a few minutes to run.

**The Drawbacks**—There is a perceived lack of romance with the super-automatics. Some people want to see the grinding and packing process. I do not share that sentiment. I just want a good espresso. And, as I have mentioned these machines are not going to challenge an expert in espresso preparation on a LaMarzocco for example. So in the gourmet coffee shops that have a strong training program the manual preparation will offer finer coffee espresso.

**The machines I favor, including the Cafina, do not contain any milk, but rather offer an external steaming wand so the operator can create a beautiful chifon milk texture and pour rosetta for the finest presentation and mouth-feel in cappuccino. Also, internal milk handling may be a problem with your local health department.**

**For more information on the Cafina click on this link to Michaelo Espresso, the North American representative for the machines: [www.michaelo.com/cafina.html](http://www.michaelo.com/cafina.html).**

**For an alternative machine, take a look at the FRANKE. It is a fine Swiss made super-automatic with external milk steaming, and I had a fine shot of espresso off of it after setting the program parameters. For more infromation contact you can contact Espresso Speciaists through their web-site: [www.esi-online.com](http://www.esi-online.com).**

**Ciao for now!**