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On The Table #21

Espresso Tamper Shape—Web Synergy

Dear cyber reader, Sometimes you get to eat your words when you are researching and publishing your results as you go.

Over the past year I've traded a series of emails with a Taiwanese student of the tricky coffee named Joseph. He has translated my web site into Chinese and seems quite enthusiastic. Finally, he writes that he is coming to the Roasteria in Seattle for a visit.

In comes a very nice man in pressed cotton shirt, poly slacks, and gold colored wire rimmed glasses, a typical looking engineer. We have coffee and he asks a number of well thought out questions in a softly accented English, about how we do things and why. Finally, I ask him about himself. "Oh," he says "I own a semi-conductor plant and have a degree in hydraulic engineering." Very Chinese this man.

Before he leaves he softly asks if I have tried a rounded bottom on my packing tool. I tell him my standard response, that the Italians have several rounded bottom packers out there but we found that they were too rounded and created a thin spot in the middle of the packed coffee. And, as the baskets that hold the coffee have flat bottoms we adopted the flat bottom packing tool in 1988 and never looked back. The logic was just too compelling that a cake of even thickness offered the most even resistance to the flow of pressurized brewing water.

He suggests a slight rounding will help with the problem of particle distribution in the ground coffee. He was absolutely right. Thank you Joseph wherever you are.

For years we have struggled with even distribution before packing to prevent the pressurized water from creating channels in the coffee during brewing. Particle distribution is critical and difficult to achieve because the particles of freshly ground coffee are all different sizes and they are highly adhesive. The wider the coffee basket you choose the more likely for channeling to occur due to differing densities in the packed coffee before brewing. Here at Vivace we have been using a 58mm basket, the widest available, and our efforts to control

channeling through precise distribution have been extensive, with mixed success. The distribution technique has proved too precise for baristas under high volume pressure.

The slightly rounded bottom, however, works like a dream, we see taller shots and less of a tendency to "miss the pour" and end up with a white-out, instead of beautiful red-brown crema. And, of great importance, the staff loves the design. (It is one thing to tinker around in your kitchen with espresso experiments, but the real test of tools and techniques comes only from skilled professionals working high volume coffee on a daily basis.)

Our Ergo-Packer has been redesigned and is available at espressovivace.com. With detachable heads you can order just the replacement piston if you already own the original Ergo-Packer.

Ciao for now!

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