



Hierarchy of pleasures

Anna Jones

The cookbook author on her top vegetarian spots in London

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SWANKY

- **Spring at Somerset House**
Skye Gyngell’s restaurant is one of those places where you need something special going on to visit. It’s my favourite room in London, so calm and serene. Their produce is grown for them by biodynamic farm Fern Verrow, a wonderful circular relationship between restaurant and growers. They cook in a way so closely tied to the seasons.
- **Bubala in Spitalfields and Soho**
This Middle Eastern restaurant is all about generous sharing food. I’ve recreated the halloumi with black seed honey at home countless times, and the latkes are legendarily crisp. It’s totally vegetarian, so it’s a rare treat to be able to eat everything on the menu.
- **Mystic Burek in Sydenham**
Spasia started making her burek pies inspired by her Balkan heritage in lockdown and has since opened a bakery/restaurant. You can order whole pies to collect each Friday. The burek are beautiful, coiled pastries filled with all sorts of magic – about £50 but you could feed 10 people. I love the parmesan, spinach and potato one with creamy roasted garlic dip.
- **Rasa in Stoke Newington**
One of the OG vegetarian restaurants in London. It’s incredible south Indian cooking – think mustard seeds, curry leaves and coconut milk. The crunchy pre-meal snacks are a favourite, and I love the punchy lemon pickle. The aubergine and beetroot curries are off the charts.
- **Gözleme in Hackney**
All over Hackney and Haringey you will find gözleme (Turkish flatbread) spots. My favourite is in the front of a fruit and veg shop called Hoxton Fruit Hackney. I always buy the potato, spinach and feta one. They’re between £2 and £4, and I think they are the best value in London. It’s very difficult to buy homemade, nutritious non-fast food any cheaper.

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SIMPLE

As told to Sinead Campbell. “Easy Wins” (4th Estate) by Anna Jones is out now

COFFEE SHOP NOTEBOOK

Rachel Hendry

The semiotics of ordering a super-large to go



“I’m so tired,” they’ll say, rummaging for their phone. “Just give me the biggest coffee you have.”

Requests like this are frequent. The presenting symptoms of weariness often include clumsiness, forgetfulness... and a drinks order that requires some tact to decipher. For starters, I want to tell them, the biggest coffee on the menu isn’t necessarily the strongest.

You see, unless you’re ordering a filter coffee, espresso will form the basis of most cups. An espresso can be consumed neat, as God intended, or it can be lengthened. Hot water or steamed milk can be added in all manners of quantities, creating different flavours and dilutions in the process. The more liquid added, the larger the drink, sure, but the longer it takes to consume, and the less concentrated the caffeine becomes in the process.

None of this is a secret. So what is it about being so busy, hungover or exhausted that leads my customers to desire the biggest coffee on the menu? A better option would be to channel a chic Italian: a succinct double espresso drunk at the bar before swiftly returning to the busy day.

What I’ve learnt from my anthropological observations in the field is that coffee can work wonders in two crucial ways. Not only will it keep fatigue at bay, it can also indicate to those around you that, no matter what work and life have thrown at you that day, you and your grande Americano have got it covered. Coffee signals that you’re an active participant in the hustle! What’s the point in being tired if no one else knows about it?

When it comes to finding solace in food and drink, there are few things that it is deemed aspirational to consume in large quantities. Coffee is one of them. Water is another. Water bottles are growing exponentially in size and status as a result. Recently, I have noticed containers in the café so big that if they contained any other liquid I’d be charging corkage.

Any TV or film prop-buyer worth their salt knows that big is best. When a character is depicted as Really Going Through It, they are not shown drinking a compact ‘spro on the go. Think of the surgical interns of *Grey’s Anatomy* yawning through their shifts with the help of a hefty takeout cappuccino, or the women of *Sex and the City* sporting sunglasses as big as their lattes as they date their way through the Upper East Side. Coffee is an accessory that provides proof of work being attempted, of physical and occupational struggle being overcome.

Now, I could stand there at the till and say all this, but I know that’s not what’s being asked of me. Because sometimes when you’re really going through it, what you need, more than the caffeine itself, is some sympathy from the barista and an acknowledgement from those around you that, yeah, you’re having a tough day but you’re still getting it done. So instead, I smile and I say:

“Biggest coffee we have? Coming right up.” **FT**

Rachel Hendry is a writer who works at a coffee shop in Cardiff