



Fonte Coffee: Bean whizzes at work.

# DISCOVERIES & DIVERSIONS

## The Modern Barista: A Sommelier By Another Name and Fruit

A passionate grower is married to the refractometer during harvest, a tool of the trade used to check sugar levels, or Brix, in the fruit. Though there is an art in making harvest decisions, science plays a big role. Is this a scene out of a vineyard? Are we talking about grapes? Would it be eye-opening for you to know that this is also the backdrop of a coffee farm?

For someone steeped in wine, I will admit to being surprised. But I've recently turned my attention to a fruit that produces a complex beverage with a sense of place, nuance and a range of flavors - coffee, the other fruit. Maybe I'm not crazy for seeing

parallels between a great cup of coffee and a great glass of wine.

There's a saying that the best wine is made in the vineyard; you get the finest grapes and treat them with respect. As Jared Rennie, founder of Noble Coffee Roasting in Ashland, Ore., explains "the job of a good coffee company is to source fantastic raw ingredients." All a roaster can do with that coffee, Rennie goes on to say, is "help it express itself or ruin it."

Master Roaster Steve Smith of Fonté Coffee Roaster in Seattle echoes this sentiment. He says a big part of his job is "developing that relationship with a producer where the producer knows that you value the work that goes into creating

BY JAMESON FINK

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that coffee and you're going to safeguard that work all the way to the consumer."

And what they do with that great raw material is much more than turn green coffee beans into brown ones. By adding heat at different rates and during different stages of the process, they influence acidity, sweetness and body. Rennie has a formula to roasting that all people passionate about the creative process can appreciate. "Science plus art equals magic," he says.

There's also magic delivered by baristas. When I order coffee, the work is obscured by a sleek machine; what's going

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on back there? At the places I visit, it seems effortless and efficient, which probably has something to do with, as Rennie explains, "skilled people making things look easy."

Smith agrees, attributing the success of a barista due to "the unglamorous realm of detail."

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consumer," he says. "They have a tremendous responsibility on their shoulders."

That's why baristas are tasting all day long, paying attention to the grind, the amount of coffee for each shot, the water temperature, the crema and the crema-to-liquid ratio. Rennie says baristas are "like a chef putting a spoon into the sauces to make sure they're good before a customer tastes them."

From source to cup, the mission is to show diversity in coffee. "Coffee is not a monolith," Rennie explains. "Origin distinction is the backbone of the business," says Smith, echoing Rennie's sentiment.

This distinction touches on the terroir concept in wine; a wine reflects a sense of place based on natural characteristics surrounding it, from soil to sun. "I'm looking for the Ethiopian coffee that beats you over the head and says, 'I cannot be from anywhere else,'" Smith says. "Those are the cups I find exciting and inspiring."

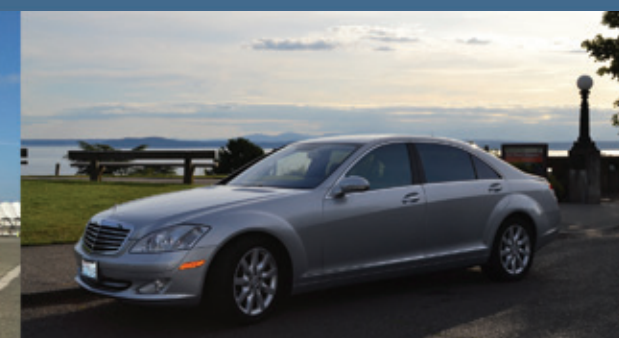
Though sometimes I just want to dash in and out for coffee, I need to take more time exploring exciting and inspiring cups. Let's say I'm in the mood for something bold. At Noble Coffee Roasters, they can point me to ten coffees that are bold, but bold in different ways. Just like a sommelier guiding me through a dozen Cabernets, an experienced barista can help you refine or expand your coffee repertoire by employing suggestions and samples.

I want to appreciate coffee in a similar manner to wine, and I'm fortunate to live in a region where that's possible. Rennie believes the jobs of the roaster and the barista are to educate the consumer, and that sharing the excitement about the world of coffee is just as important. As Smith concludes "the best coffee people have a loyalty to coffee that supersedes all other things."



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# TRENDSETTERS: THE AVANT-GARDE OF DRINK

by Treve Ring



## SPIRITS – COCKTAIL CLASSES & DIY DRINKS

According to Andy McClellan, Bar Manager of Seattle's hopping **GOLDEN BEETLE**, cocktail classes for the public were a natural. "Nowadays, restaurants have to be more than just a place that serves food and drinks," says McClellan. "The cocktail classes are simply an extension of our passion for this industry." Class topics for their inaugural summer school set were focused on the basics and McClellan said that people jumped at the chance to learn from the pros. Serious enthusiasts can take it a step further this fall at Vancouver's Pacific Institute of Culinary Arts. Well-known spirits columnist Joanne Sasvari is leading *Shaken and Stirred: An Introduction to Craft Cocktails*, over eight weeks. Her hands-on class focuses on the theory, structure, history, ingredients, tools, techniques and, of course, the crafting of cocktails.



## WINE – GOING FOR GROWLERS

It works well for water, gas, and yes – thankfully beer. Now some adventurous local wineries are using growlers for wine. If you're not familiar with the term, a growler is a refillable container, such as a small keg, pitcher or bottle that is used to transport your liquid of choice. Woodinville, Wash.'s Ross Andrew Winery has been offering their growler program since releasing the 2005 vintage. They sell 3 or 5 liter bottles, the price of which includes two refills. The vintage and wine depends on what the winery is bottling next after the bottle has been returned. There's no time limit, and the bottle is etched with the vintage. "It's a great way for our wines to be opened and talked about in front of a larger, hopefully new group of wine enthusiasts," says winemaker and owner Ross Andrew Mickel.

## BEER – FROM GRAIN TO GLASS

In an effort to raise their beer from grain to glass, some local breweries are starting to farm their own hops and barley. Newport, Ore.'s Rogue Brewery has decreed their line of Chatoe Rogue brews as GYO Certified, a Rogue term for Grow Your Own. The barley from their 235-acre farm was used in the creation of two types of malts – Dare and Risk, aptly named for their gutsy decision to plant in the unproven Tygh Valley Appellation. BC's Gulf Islands Brewery also harvests hops from its own organic estate as well as from neighboring Salt Spring Island growers. "The brewery participates in some of the farming labor," says brewery co-owner Becky Julseth. "In exchange, we get a reliable supply of locally-grown hops at a reasonable price."



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