

Chatt Chow Down

THE SEARCH FOR EXTRAORDINARY DINING

BY LAUREN NETTLES

Lauren Nettles
FOOD ENTHUSIAST

Food enthusiast Lauren has eaten in 12 countries and hopes to continue sampling tasty treats around the globe. In the meantime, she's thrilled to thoroughly test all Chattanooga cuisine that crosses her path.

BRASH COFFEE

There's no shortage of excellent food in Chattanooga; walking into any restaurant downtown is almost certain to end with a full stomach and a big smile. However, it takes more than just fabulous fare to create an exceptional dining experience, and so we set out in search of the extra touches that make all the difference.

With an hour or so to spare on one chilly December day, I decided to explore our local coffee and tea scene, and found myself wandering into Brash Coffee. When I approached the coffee bar, Allie, one of the baristas on duty, offered quick and friendly service. I admitted I didn't know what I wanted; I like coffee, but I was a little intimidated by the long names and descriptions of the two featured coffee beans on the menu. She immediately jumped to my rescue, asking me what I usually liked. When I said I'm a big fan of chai lattes, she suggested a selection of similar tea and milk combos, like a London Fog, a delicious mix of steamed milk and Earl Grey tea.

Although I was tempted to stay in my comfort zone, I decided to forge new ground and brave the "fancy coffee." She walked me through the drip coffees and

espressos — The first option was Eliodora Castellanos from Honduras, which she described as having "a ton of sweet potato and honey-glazed carrot notes" and a subtlety that made it perfect for enjoying slowly and letting the flavors develop. The second coffee boasted "strawberry, raspberry and butterscotch notes," which was an excellent contrasting option for anyone with a sweet tooth.

Since I usually associate coffee with sweetness, I was intrigued by the idea of a savory coffee flavor and decided to try a latte with Eliodora Castellanos. It was earthy and rich; the combination of sweet potato flavor and the slight sweetness of the milk and honey carrots was just as she had described and uniquely satisfying.

I also ate a suggested lemon donut — I'm a huge fan of lemon-flavored pastries, but they can be difficult to get right. There's a tendency to try to overcompensate for the sourness of the lemon by making the rest of it too sweet — not the case with this donut. Much like the coffee, the balance of flavors was perfect. The cake was light, and the glaze was unmistakably lemon without overpowering the delicate flavor of the cake.

Before settling down at the bar by the window to watch the rain and enjoy my treats, I asked Allie and fellow barista, Matt, to explain what makes Brash's service so above and beyond the norm.

Owner Matt Ludwikowski begins developing this unique customer service experience during his hiring process. He asks questions about how coffee fits into the lives of each of his baristas. "Most of us have answered fairly similarly, just saying that coffee is a lot simpler than people think it is," says Allie. "It's water and beans. What we want to do is make everything as simple and as easy for our customers to understand while still offering the best coffee we possibly can. I think that's what Matt [Ludwikowski] looks for when he hires: someone who can understand that and come down from a level of knowledge ... to be with the customers."

HUMBLE KNOWLEDGEABLE APPROACHABLE

According to Allie, the three words that best describe the ideal Brash employee are humble, knowledgeable and approachable. "Do you feel like I am trying to be over you? I think that's a common issue that's in coffee right now, people feeling like the coffee community is pretentious. People think [when] they go into a coffee shop, 'Well, I better not put cream or sugar in this,' and what we try to do is to make you feel like what you order is not going to be stupid. How you like your coffee is how you like it, and that's totally fine. I just try to pay attention to that and make sure they feel loved and comforted."

After being hired, the baristas truly go the extra mile to make customers feel like they belong at Brash. "We take notes on conversations we have so that it's easier for us to have a customer

that we know by name. We know that their family is going to Disney World or we know that they just went on a date, things like that. We keep track of that most of the time. That helps us be able to have better interactions that are more personal to make people feel comfortable," Allie says.

"There's something to the fact that we chose to do this as a career. I think that makes us more approachable," Matt says. "This is what we care about, and this is what we want people to know about," Allie agrees.

During these cold days, be sure to visit Brash Coffee in Warehouse Row at 1110 Market Street to experience the best in coffee, tea, bakery items and an invitingly cozy home away from home.

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BARISTA ALLIE PREPARES A POUROVER

BARISTAS ALLIE AND MATT DISCUSS THEIR PASSION FOR COFFEE

