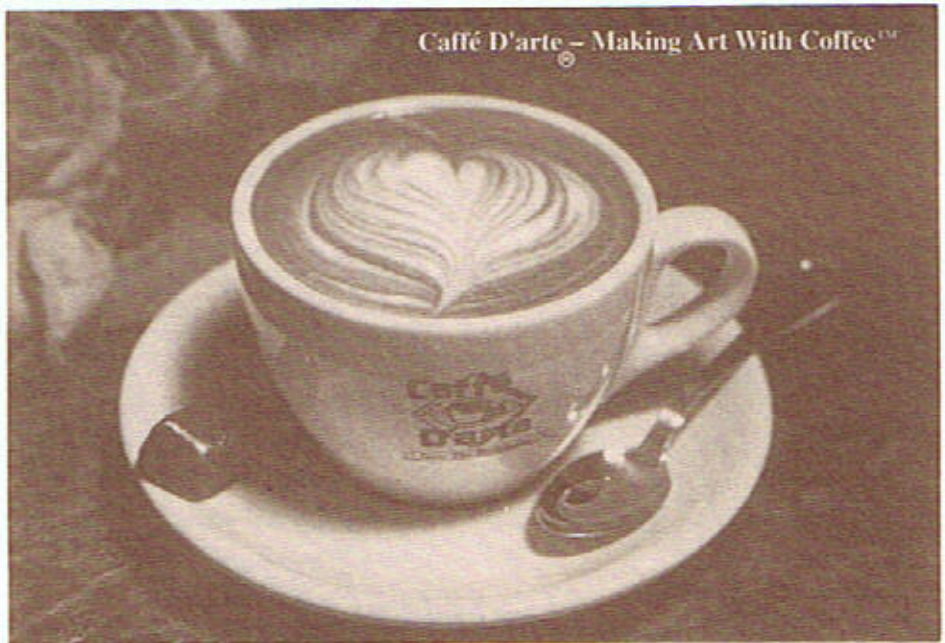




Taste The Difference!®

Mauro Cipolla of Caffé D'arte, analyzes the quality of espresso extraction throughout the specialty espresso industry and focuses on the most common problems during the espresso extraction process.



COMMON PROBLEMS AND RELATIVE SOLUTIONS - PART 1

We began gathering the information for this article by analyzing our own database which contains more than 6,000 exchanges with espresso industry professionals over the last three years. Much of the information came from attending educational coffee meetings and coffee and espresso extraction clinics; some came from telephone surveys or written surveys conducted at specialty espresso bars. These surveys were often completed with the support of one of our espresso specialists. We then reviewed the compiled information and constructed an analysis of the most common problems found in today's espresso bars.

It is important to note that each and every market has its own unique set of problems. In Seattle, for instance, where there is a mature and competitive espresso market place, we faced certain problems that differed from

what we found in other geographic areas that had different market life cycles.

Before getting into the details of what detracts from the machines capability to extract espresso, we must discuss the importance of an espresso bar's sense of mission and the level of training required for its baristas.

People have to care before they can make a difference. This is why an espresso bar's sense of mission and the way this mission is instilled in its workers is of vital importance. A clear specialty coffee mission and a commitment that goes beyond words and shallow marketing will enable a barista to give customers a coffee experience that is remembered "cup by cup" each and every day.

The second issue, the level of training the espresso bar provides its barista, is also of vital importance. If the barista lacks training, the

solution is obvious - the barista needs to be trained. Where things gets murky is when a barista has been trained incorrectly. The solution here is to continually monitor the barista's output to see if more training, or retraining, is necessary. Finally, when a barista does not acquire a moderate amount of skill or isn't open to learning anything new - or worse, when a barista refuses further training because he has been extracting espresso for years and believes he is fully "experienced" - the solution may be to find a new barista.

Regarding espresso equipment: most industry professionals don't know their machine's "vital signs" and how their equipment can be fine tuned. In fact, almost 100% of the professionals surveyed didn't know their machine's proper incoming water pressure readings or the pump water pressure setting. Some didn't know the proper



water temperature at the group heads or within the boiler. And almost everyone didn't know how to adjust the incoming water pressure, pump pressure, or water temperature.

Under the conditions mentioned above, no matter what type of coffee or equipment you have, underextraction or overextraction is bound to occur; and you won't know why it's happening or how to correct it. Off-flavors will inevitably develop and inconsistency will be forever present. Ultimately, your end user will go somewhere else for a better and more consistent coffee experience. The solution: take the time to understand the proper installation parameters of your equipment and make sure that you know how to check these parameters.

The next problem was understanding the principle of cycling for water temperature control while extracting espressos. Once again, most baristas interviewed did not,

and as it turned out, many of them struggled with this concept. Since espresso machines vary in design and structure, they also vary in how they respond to the same volume of demand. For example, some machines tend to get hotter (or cooler) the more they are used. So the barista should know his or her machine relative to how it responds to water temperature fluctuations in relation to the demand of drink production.

Once a barista understands the equipment's parameters, he or she should know how to keep the water temperature at the group head as stabilized as possible, no matter how much the demand for drinks fluctuates. This is achieved either by cycling water (running water free flow) from a group head to cool it down (or to heat it back up) before the next extraction, or by cycling the usage of group heads (left to right group head, etc.) to give the last head used time to return to the proper

temperature before making a new drink.

Another problem is the daily cleaning of espresso equipment. Ten years ago, people didn't know that they had to clean their equipment every day. This is no longer the case. The new problem is that people are using too much Puro-Caff or cleaning agents of similar nature; and after back washing with these agents, they are not properly rinsing the group head. Additionally, there is now a fallacy that the group screens do not have to be removed from the group head to backwash the espresso machine.

Both of the mistakes mentioned above detract from the flavor of the espresso and from the machine's extraction capability. The solution is to remove the screens for proper cleaning and use less amounts of cleaning agents. It is also important to rinse extremely well after back washing. In Part II, we will look at the replacement of grinder burrs and at proper grind adjustment. We will also identify what fresh grinding means and look at some misconceptions about crema. Finally we will address underextraction problems related to dosing, time of extraction, visual errors of water volume, and choice of porta filter basket shapes. "Viva il Buon Caffè."

