

SCHOOL



copenhagen

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a c a d e m y

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If not for the sparkling La Marzocco espresso machines and trace grounds of coffee here and there, the Copenhagen Coffee Academy (CCA) could pass as a secret laboratory, the likes of which are normally only seen projected on the movie screen or hidden in some clandestine bunker buried beneath the Pentagon.

But that's pretty much par for the course when it comes to espresso masterminds Martin Hildebrandt and Jens Nørgaard, conceptualists and operations managers of the CCA, perhaps the most scientifically-based espresso and coffee educational institute in the world. *Continued on page 36*

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Developed in an effort to build a rich and creative coffee culture by gathering the most skilled espresso craftsmen and combining their talents with the most up-to-the-minute information, the Copenhagen Coffee Academy employs

Association of America's annual Conference and Exhibition in Miami, Fla., in 2001.

Though the CCA is tied closely to Café Europa, as both spaces are populated by the Danish and international coffee

Stately & Discreet

Faithful to traditional Danish architecture, the exterior of the CCA's operation is dignified and basic, scarcely decipherable from neighboring buildings. Inside, however, the goings-on of daily business



The Copenhagen Coffee Academy staff members take a break from evaluating roasted beans. Clockwise from left, Andreas Kragh, Jens Nørgaard, Morten Münchow, and Martin Hildebrandt.

professionals dedicated to harvesting that synergistic effect to the benefit of its students. Among them are Hildebrandt and Nørgaard themselves, both long time experts and familiar faces in the international specialty coffee community; Nørgaard's Café Europa is a veritable institution for exceptional espresso in Copenhagen, and Hildebrandt, also of Café Europa, won the prestigious title of World Barista Champion at the Specialty Coffee

culture, as well as relevant experts from various universities in Denmark whose studies focus on coffee and milk science, the CCA is a school in the truest sense of the word: all espresso enthusiasts are welcome to pursue barista certification here, and coffee experts are encouraged to explore milk science and investigate handling techniques to their hearts' content within the CCA's four walls.

are downright exotic, even given the city's residents' propensity for great coffee. But then, Nørgaard has already found a respectable level of fame for raising the bar on espresso education and excellence in Copenhagen.

Nørgaard's Café Europa was inspired by the café culture he found in various European countries. He extracted aspects of each locale he admired with the idea of fusing them together in one espresso bar:

espresso coffee from Italy; traditional full-service from France; and the convention of the coffeehouse from Austria. But Nørgaard's obsession with espresso had yet to manifest itself until Hildebrandt joined him in the business in 1993. Together, they found themselves more fixated on espresso each year, culminating in 1998 when, unbeknownst to either of them, they began intensive training for the World Barista Championship (WBC). They attended the very first WBC in 2000 in Monte Carlo, and went home with the third-place trophy. Top honors went to Norwegian Robert Thoresen of Mocca Kaffebar & Brenner, and the rivalry between Denmark and Norway—long-standing in history books but new in the world of espresso—had begun. And the intensity of their competition only increased when Hildebrandt went on to win the WBC for Denmark in 2001.

But while countless barista competitors begin and end their coffee journey with competition, Hildebrandt and Nørgaard had bigger plans. Their intent to use the WBC win as a springboard for more widespread barista education, actually, is one of the missions of the CCA. "We advise barista competition winners on how to use their success in the best possible way, that is, to work to further coffee culture and education," says Hildebrandt. "That way, these champions are using their position to follow a career in coffee all the while making a decent living. This is so much more important than wasting their minutes of fame doing stuff that will be forgotten soon after." Based on their experiences in not just Monte Carlo and Miami, but also in travels to coffee events around the world, Nørgaard and Hildebrandt developed the vision of creating a stable milieu for coffee education, skill development and scientific experiment. The CCA is the concrete realization of that one-time ephemeral vision.

Experts from the Field

Finding talented espresso trainers dwelling in Denmark to staff the CCA wasn't an issue for Hildebrandt and Nørgaard; Copenhagen itself is home to barista champions known around the world. But experience had taught the pair that it takes a great deal more than individual barista skills to successfully impart knowledge to others.

So it should come as no surprise that they named Troels Poulsen to be the CCA's head trainer. Besides earning fourth-place honors in the 2003 WBC, Poulsen proved his gumption as team leader of an elite group of Danish baristas, guiding the four teammates to win the second annual Nordic Barista Cup event held in October 2004 in Iceland. Furthermore, for four years Poulsen has trained the 30 baristas of Café Europa on an ongoing basis. And in March, Poulsen again won the Danish National Competition, earning another shot at the World Barista Championship title this time in Seattle, Wash., in April.

Poulsen is joined at the CCA by Andreas Kragh, formerly a Café Europa barista, whose exceptional organizational skills, have made major contributions to the execution of such renowned barista events as the Nordic Barista Cup, the World Barista Championship and the international barista competition judging certification process.

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Proving the significance of what was recently considered a trend in barista education but is now more universally recognized as a critical focus in espresso expertise is Hildebrandt and Nørgaard's decision to hire scientist Morten Münchow, an expert in molecular gastronomy who earned his degree at the University of Denmark and who has a deep interest in and passion for further study of the composition of milk.

"In addition to the synergy effect (of having) enthusiastic craftsmen meeting each other,

we similarly have great expectations to see the synergy effect of our activities in molecular gastronomy where skilled craftsmanship meets science," says Hildebrandt. "We believe that progress is a neverending journey, and our focus on service and cultural aspects makes us contribute to defining the role of the barista and continually taking it to the next level." For example,

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the CCA also involves chefs of different cultural backgrounds and professional training to contribute to the signature drink building program, among them Troels Trier Vogel.

Above All Else: Customer Service

Barista skills are the building blocks of the Copenhagen Coffee Academy, says Nørgaard, who defines the foundation of those skills as giving the customer the best possible sensory experience.

"As a group, we have knowledge about a lot of aspects of the coffee phenomenon," says Nørgaard of the CCA team. "We offer education in coffee in general, i.e. beans, roasting and grinding, espresso, latte art, drip coffee, barista-relevant aspects of milk and water, maintenance of coffee equipment, guidance on how to arrange coffee events, and on how to prepare for participation in competitions."

These topics are covered traditionally, with hands-on training in sensory development and skill building, as well as scholastic business courses. But where the CCA differs from espresso institutions elsewhere in the world is around Hildebrandt and Nørgaard's decision to centralize activities in education and research on molecular gastronomy.

"Scientists have always been essential in the food industry, helping to maximize profit and efficiency," says Münchow. "Science in food has had a reputation for making 'synthetic food' as opposed to natural and organic food. But we at the CCA believe that if the chefs and scientists focus on the creative and progressive potential of the meeting (of science and food),

molecular gastronomy can be a great milieu to produce serious and precise results.”

In order to stay abreast of scientific developments related to coffee and milk, the CCA's staff maintains relationships with the Danish Royal Agricultural and Veterinary University's Department of Molecular Gastronomy and the Department of Dairy Chemistry. “The issue of milk in espresso-based coffee is so new,” says Münchow, “that research and development have only just begun.” In cooperation with Danish professor Richard Ipsen, Münchow created the first tentative model of the foam in cappuccino, combining the general organic foam theory with knowledge of surface-active molecules in milk.

“Such a model, if properly taught to baristas, could make the difference between a mediocre espresso drink and a superior one,” says Stephen Vick, espresso program trainer for Stumptown Coffee in Portland, Ore., who attended Münchow's lecture on the subject at the Nordic Barista Cup in Iceland. “Many baristas come to the coffee industry with minimal scientific or engineering backgrounds. But science and engineering contribute so much to proper preparation and understanding of espresso. What Jens and Martin are offering through the Copenhagen Coffee Academy is not only remarkable, it's unprecedented.”

Class In Session

The CCA staff caters to students' specific interests and always takes into account the range of skill levels and interests of baristas they teach. “Given the complexity of the subjects we cover in our

courses, as well as what is of interest to particular people, and their capacity for learning, we develop courses around *their* needs,” says Nørgaard. “Later, we will make specific course modules to facilitate the choices of the students.”

This rings true to Dismas Smith, co-owner and barista trainer for Hotwire Coffee Co. in Shoreline, Washington. Prior to the 2003 United States Barista Championship, Smith and his co-competitors spent several days training with Hildebrandt and Nørgaard in Seattle.

Each of the three barista competitors on the team were focusing on different challenges of competition. One had difficulty perfecting his signature drink. Another was struggling to smooth out his performance and customer service skills. And Smith, a former national barista champion, was daunted not by the on-stage performance aspect, but by the effort of predicting new trends and curveballs that could potentially be thrown at him during the competition.

“Jens and Martin know an unbelievable amount about coffee and barista techniques,” says Smith, who looks forward to seeing the pair at the 2005 World Barista Championship. There, Smith will join Hildebrandt, Nørgaard, and hundreds of other barista enthusiasts from around the world to watch Poulsen, the reigning Danish champion, compete once again for top honors. “If what they're teaching at the Copenhagen Coffee Academy compares to the subject matter they covered with us in just four days, it's in any barista's best interest to consider signing up for classes.”