

There are a lot of coffee lovers out there, but not as many “coffee connoisseurs.” If you really love quality coffee, I’d like to offer a list of things to look for to begin exploring the best there is about coffee.

First of all, it’s important to note that coffee is food. As it ages, the oils that naturally develop as part of the roasting process get old and rancid. Compare your coffee to bread. As the bread ages it hardens and becomes stale. **Recommendation: Buy only enough coffee to use within 2-3 weeks.**

Storing coffee in your freezer is advised by many people. I’ve even heard this from some roasters who have pretty impressive resumes when it comes to coffee. However, I have to ask: Who does it serve when a coffee purveyor advises that you put your coffee in the freezer? Why is it necessary to buy more than you need? If you put roasted coffee in your freezer, naturally, it retards the process of aging to a degree. (To what degree I can’t say, but I welcome scientific analysis on this subject.) In reality, the issue is not the freezing of the coffee. It’s the thawing it that matters. Taking previously frozen product out of your freezer begins a process that allows frozen oil to do what previously frozen oil does: melt. Thawing oil mixed with natural watery condensation is not a happy combination. **Recommendation: Store coffee in an airtight container, without freezing.**

During the coffee roasting process, raw, green beans typically get heated to the 420 degree Fahrenheit range. Like popcorn, the coffee bean begins to expand. Essentially, the internal structure of this once-very-tight little bean expands two to three times its original size. At the same time, the water within the bean—its natural essence—is vaporized during the process of heating and roasting. In the final weighing, it’s fairly common for each bean to lose 10-15% in water weight. So, the bean has expanded, but it has lost weight; its internal fibers have expanded and it is now “sweating” from its open pores. At this



Creating Coffee Connoisseurs

BY KARL SEIDEL

point, when you grind the bean to make a pot of coffee, you are exposing its already compromised and fragile facade to the brutal element of air. From this point on, every minute, the bean loses more of its essence and flavor. **Recommendation: Don’t grind your coffee beans until it’s time to brew your coffee.**

In a recent article I read in “Cooks Illustrated,” the author asked various coffee roaster purveyors when the coffee she had purchased at the supermarket had been roasted at their plants. The answer will surprise you. The range was from 6 months ago to 2 years ago! Why would you pay your hard-earned money for something cooked 2 years ago? The process of discovery can be a real eye-opener. A local roaster can sell you recently roasted beans. In addition, since that roaster knows you personally, he/she will be better able to recommend new types of coffees that you may like. Ask your local roaster what types of coffees he/she likes to drink. Also ask what a “French Roast” is and what kind of coffee beans are in that roast. A little bit of research on your part will give you a much greater understanding of what coffee is. Then, try different coffees

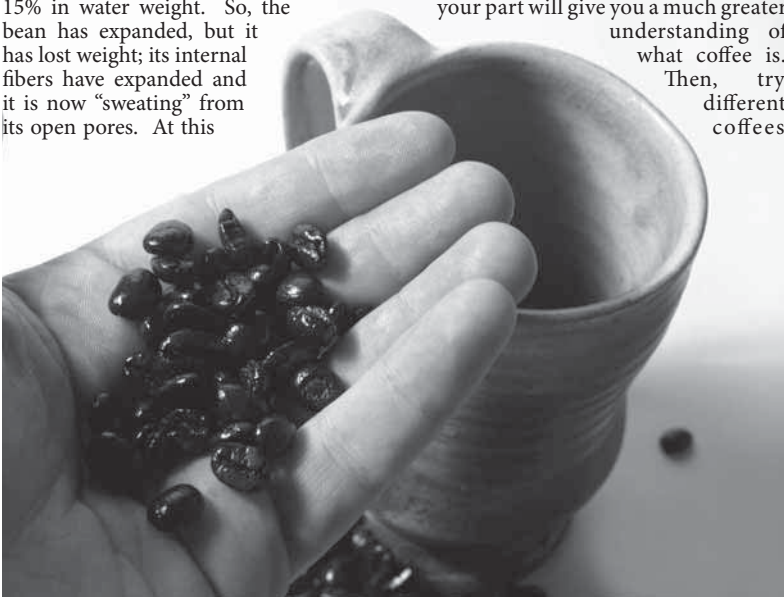
so that you find out what your preferences are. **Recommendation: Locate a local coffee roaster and talk to them about what you like.**

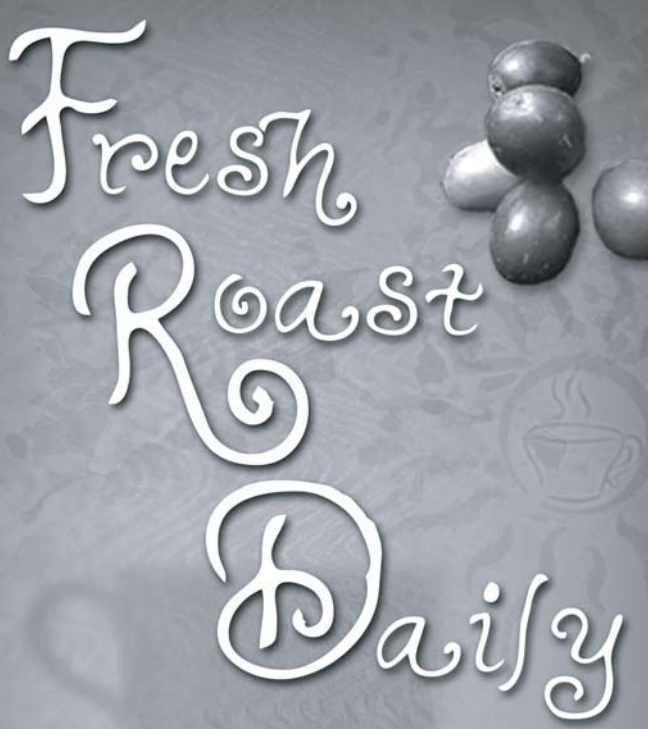
I often hear from people, “Is this Colombian Coffee?” or, “I only want Colombian-quality beans.” What this tells me, more than anything, is that people have heard the word of the Colombian marketers and they have responded well to Juan Valdez. (Hey, Juan now has his

own Web site and has even opened up cafes in New York City!) The point is that there is a wide world of coffee out there that spans over 60 coffee-producing countries. Although Colombia is prominent in our minds, take a moment and consider beans from places like Panama, Africa, Guatemala, and Costa Rica. One of my favorite coffees comes from a little estate named La Torcaza in Panama. **Recommendation: Broaden your horizons and try beans from around the world.**

Once you’ve started trying all sorts of new brews, the final step is to learn to taste your coffee. If you’re putting cream and sugar in before you’ve had a sip, then you’re not really getting the best that coffee has to offer. It’s OK if you prefer cream and/or sugar with your coffee, but give your bean a chance to introduce itself first—especially if you’re trying a blend for the first time. **Recommendation: Practice sipping and tasting your new coffees black.**

Karl Seidel is a local coffee roaster (www.FreshRoastDaily.com) and trade journal writer who is making his debut foray into the local readers market with this article. Compliments and critique are accepted and appreciated. E-mail: Karl@FreshRoastDaily.com





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