

Desperately Seeking a Decent Cup of Joe

It's a scenario that has happened to many of us before — we enjoy a great meal with attentive service, beautiful décor, and tasty, innovative food. And then comes the coffee — and the acrid, black sludge in the cup before us casts a shadow over the whole experience. Simply put, a beautiful meal can be ruined with a mediocre cup of coffee, and for some strange reason, despite the time and effort that goes into sourcing just the right items for a gourmet meal, the coffee is often forgotten. At the end of the day, a decent cup of joe doesn't cost a restaurant much more than a bad one, and can really improve the dining experience overall.

So, what is the difference between a good cup of coffee and a bad one? To begin with, the type of beans reflect the flavor in the cup. Typically, high quality microroasters tend to select their beans more carefully, (often fair trade and organic), and roast them fresh each week to meet current orders. Small, hand crafted batches are roasted versus those who roast thousands of pounds at once. If those beans don't sell immediately they are often shelved, which means the customer isn't receiving the freshest product possible. In addition, fair trade and organic are huge trends, with the potential for organic beans overtaking non-organic sales eventually. Customers are becoming increasingly aware of the unfair practices that have plagued the coffee industry, and don't mind paying a little more for their beans, knowing they are helping these communities to earn a fair living. The **Cafe Femenino Foundation** is a perfect example of how this trend is gaining in popularity. A co-op of women in Peru, Mexico and other developing nations, they

support women's efforts to improve their roles through community projects and programs. Their coffee is sold as fair trade, which earns them an extra ten cents per pound on top of the regular price for coffee, plus the Femenino Foundation receives another five cents per pound. It may not sound like much, but it is truly a substantial amount in these countries. In an area where women often have little rights and are abandoned and abused, this makes a big difference in lives of the women, offering a chance to improve their self esteem, community, and lives.

Tastes have also changed — restaurant diners in particular tend to enjoy good quality coffee on a daily basis, whether at home with a quality coffee maker and grinder, or at a coffee shop. With the advent of Starbucks and it's many offshoots, consumers are increasingly discriminating about the quality of the coffee they consume. Without even necessarily knowing it, the increasingly sophisticated palette can now tell the difference between coffees, and know when it's been brewed and left to stand in an old style glass carafe, rendering the beverage to acidic to drink.

According to **David Chall** of **Upper Midwest Gourmet**, a premium foods distributor, coffee pairings are becoming increasingly popular — similar to wine, different coffees, because of their climate and soil elevation, hold different flavors — from chocolate to berry to honey. Intricate flavors within the beans can be heightened when served with the right dish — for example, an Ethiopian harrar goes beautifully with a blueberry cobbler, because of the natural berry tones within the bean. Upper Midwest Gourmet hosts coffee pairings often,

Suggested Coffee Pairings

David Chall knows his beans well. Here are some of his suggestions for coffee and dessert pairings to try this holiday season.

Bolivian "Colonial Caranavi"

Spicy, heavy bodied and buttery with a mild nutty flavor, this bean is a good compliment to shortbread or bread pudding.

Dominican Republic "Barahona"

Mild yet complex, this coffee has notes of vanilla and fruit. Serve with tiramisu, crème brûlée or gelato.

Honduran SHG Olancho

A medium acidity with good body and caramel sweetness in the finish makes this a perfect accompaniment to dulce de leche, crème brûlée, or a caramel flan.

Matador Espresso

Creamy, nutty and rich, with a good amount of sweetness and crema. This is excellent for drinking straight espresso, and would pair well with molten chocolate cake and biscotti.



Frothy coffee paired with biscotti — a classic combination

Ethiopian Harrar

Fruity, with winy acidity, this coffee has a rich finish and fragrance of ripe blueberries. Pairs well with fruit berry cobbler, berry gelato, or fruit pies.

Ethiopian Yirgacheffe

The "Champagne of coffees," Yirgacheffe is unique, with a floral bouquet, defined citrus notes and a mellow body. The quality mark of Ethiopian coffees is very high, which makes this one of Chall's favorite regions. Pairs beautifully with just about anything!

highlighting how different flavors marry well with different foods. With the largest variety of fair trade and organic coffees in the country, they import beans from unique locations, such as the Dominican Republic (dubbed their cocktail party coffee, beans from the Dominican are spicy

and mild, with a little touch of fruit).

For information on these unique beans, contact Upper Midwest Gourmet at www.uppermidwestgourmet.net, 612.728.7208, or for the full story about the Cafe Femenino Foundation visit www.cafefemeninofoundation.org.