



Wilson's
Coffee & Tea

The Art of Espresso Blending

Many people who roast and blend coffee describe the process as an art and a science. The careful record keeping, extensive experimentation and systematic approach to determining the best way to roast and blend for a particular taste is the science part. The intuition of the roaster and blender and the subjective nature of what constitutes the best taste of various coffees makes up the art part.

When asked about roasting and blending, we have tended to downplay the art side of this. While no two coffees are roasted in exactly the same way, there is a method that can be used to find out what that way is. Likewise, most of our blends are developed in a very systematic manner.

Espresso, however, is art. there is no shortage of articles and advice on how to make the perfect espresso blend. Most come from biased sources. The Association of Brazilian Coffee Exporters has claimed that espresso must be based on Brazilian coffee. Italian roasters who have been using robusta coffee in espresso claim that good espresso must have a little robusta. Every article that provides the one true way to create the perfect espresso blend has been wrong. The best anybody can do is say, "I like espresso that tastes like this. Right now I'm getting it by doing that."

There are some reasons why this would be the case. Coffee is an agricultural product with a flavor that depends a great deal on the particular micro-climate the coffee comes from, the handling of that coffee on the farm, the methods of processing in the producing country, and finally the judgement of the coffee roaster. Coffee from the same farm will taste different from year to year due to variations in the composition of the soil and changes in temperature and rainfall. Coffee from one side of a river will taste different from coffee on the other side. This is not unique to coffee used as espresso but it is especially true in the case of espresso.

Espresso has been described as the greatest way to prepare coffee. While that judgement depends on who drinks it, properly prepared espresso preserves more of the compounds that contribute to the flavor and aroma of coffee than any other brewing method. These are components that are destroyed on contact with water in other methods or that go off into the air. The crema of espresso preserves these by trapping those elements that vanish in water in its tiny bubbles and it creates a barrier for those elements that would otherwise vanish into the air. As such, two coffees that are roasted to taste the same when brewed by any other method may taste quite different from each other when prepared as espresso.

The only way to determine if a blend will taste good as espresso is to try it as espresso. Experience with the coffees prepared in other ways can not be directly related to how those coffees will behave as espresso.

Espresso should be smooth and sweet, deep and intense, and there should be a complexity of flavor that remains interesting after the cup is empty. For this, an artistic intuition is more important than the particular ingredients because great espresso truly is greater than the sum of its parts.