

flirtatious, merely hospitable or a downright Coffee Nazi. But most importantly, they always love tasting their espresso coffees.

Taste is as important for the barista as it is for the customer. When interviewing potential staff for a position in one of my espresso bars, I quickly learned to ask the hopeful employees if they liked coffee. Without liking the material you are working with, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to have a sympathetic understanding of the product and the customer who purchases it. This is one of the unspoken things customers pick up on. And often without even realizing it, customers will gravitate towards the café that is staffed by baristas who are passionate about their product.

On the other hand, there are also those baristas who can create fancy patterns with milk or chocolate mixed with crema, but sadly they don't have a fundamental understanding of, and sympathy for, the brewing of coffee. Their passion for excellence is lacking, which is an essential piece in a larger puzzle. Without passion, the so-called "Espresso-X Factor," is missing. This passion combined with hard-headed, good organizational skills, is the key to many outstanding and successful businesses and is the true Espresso-X Factor.

My scientific approach to espresso came from my training. I learned to carefully and laboriously weigh and set a commercial grinder to dispense a precise weight of coffee grinds, accurate down to a tenth of a gram. What I have since come to realize is that the trouble with this method is that different roast colors and blends will have different densities. So, once the grinder is set for a particular roast, it will need to be reset for one that varies even by a couple of points on an Agtron spectrophotometer scale. (A spectrophotometer, which measures roast color, is as essential to good coffee roasting as a thermometer.)

What I have found during my extensive experimentation, is that beans that look exactly the same to the naked eye, can taste extremely different depending on how those beans have been roasted. The spread of difference between the color reading of the outside of the bean and the coffee inside, is also critical to good flavor development and can only be measured accurately with a spectrophotometer.

I also learned during my scientific training that the speed at which the lever on the side of the grinder is pulled will vary the amount of coffee that drops into the porta-filter. This too will vary according to the coarseness or fineness of the coffee grinds. Dosing by weight rather than volume reveals a lack of understanding of the 'coffee press,' which is absolutely necessary in order to make a succulent espresso. This small, but important element, can make the brewing of espresso coffee a very inexact, frustrating, and elusive science.