

The grand tour

Leanne Tolra
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What: The First Pour

Where: 20-26 Bond Street, Abbotsford

When: 8am-5pm Mon-Fri; 9am-1pm Sat

Cost: short black \$2.50

Check out: Coffee-addict paraphernalia

EIGHT of us are standing around a long, stainless-steel table scattered with mounds of coffee beans from around the world. We're watching Peter Wolff frantically scribbling descriptions of each mound's characteristics beside it, straight onto the table with a black marker pen: "acidic", "chocolate", "fruity" . . .

We're inside Veneziano Caffè's roasting room and Wolff, the company's master roaster, is conducting one of his monthly roasting tours. If he were any more enthusiastic or passionate, he'd burst into flames.

With rapid-fire speech and bouncy good humour, Wolff talks us through coffee history, green-bean origins, grade sizes, geographic location, coffee trends and trivia.

There's a lot to take in, but the tour group, most of them here courtesy of the CoffeeSnobs website (www.coffeesnobs.com.au), are tucking titbits of knowledge into sharply tuned coffee memories. Any questions they can squeeze in between Wolff's coffee banter are sharp and purposeful: one young man is looking to set up his own roasting business; another a cafe; a couple is considering a new espresso machine.

Veneziano's roasting business has operated from this Abbotsford location for five years, but this year a trio of business partners set up an adjoining cafe and training school - The First Pour. The trio includes Wolff, business manager Craig Dickson and company founder Rocky Veneziano.

The cafe is tucked away, but its growing reputation is attracting a steady stream of customers. The bare concrete floors and timber tables are simple enough, but the eclectic mix of caffeine-related paraphernalia lining benches and shelves cries serious coffee venue. And just in case you doubted that, look for the shiny new FB80 La Marzocco espresso machine (it's the one used at the World Barista Championships).

The cafe is staffed by Australian barista champion David Makin, who runs his own barista training school there; Cassie-Anne Lawry, the Danes Gourmet Coffee Institute champion in 2005 and third placegetter in this year's Victorian barista competition; and Jesse Hyde from Queensland - Bean There reckons he's another star in the making - who had the company in his sights when he moved to Victoria.

It is serving its Veneziano Estate coffee, an organic and Rainforest Alliance-certified blend (an eco-label given to farms that meet environmental standards) called Pure and also has the company's award-winning blends Forza and Bella Vita on offer. There's a rotating range of specialty single-origin

blends offered on a chalkboard, too, always expertly made and served with devotion.

Off to one side there's a roast-your-own-coffee area, with a selection of more than 20 green beans to choose from. Staff are on hand to recommend what to blend and how to roast to budding roasters.

It's a pretty complete, and very enthusiastic, package.

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