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THE FINER BEANS IN LIFE

STEP INTO THE WORLD OF LUXURY COFFEE WITH **AMIR GEHL**, ENTREPRENEUR AND FOUNDER OF DIFFERENCE COFFEE CO.

WORDS · EMMA WHEATON

When I speak to Amir Gehl, he is changing coffee capsules at his company, Difference Coffee Co. The production of six new coffees meant that over the past 24 hours, Amir had tried about 180 cups of coffee. "That's not to say I drank them all!" he says, "I had about a sip of each but that is still more than 40 cups of coffee – that is a lot of coffee." It's all in a day's work for a coffee guru.

Launched in 2016, Difference Coffee Co. sources rare coffee beans from the world's best coffee estates, purchasing prize-winning beans at exclusive auctions before selling them as coffee pods or roasted to order. Amir provides specialty coffee direct to consumers as well as the likes of Michelin-starred restaurants, high-end hotels and private clubs. He



also hosts sell-out masterclasses and gives regular presentations to discerning coffee lovers, including enthusiasts, executives, politicians and celebrities.

The notion of specialty coffee gained attention in recent years with the growing popularity of award-winning *kopi luwak* (civet coffee) – a flavoursome luxury coffee made up of coffee cherries partly digested by civet cats. And yes, Amir has turned those into coffee capsules.



Amir is a 41-year-old London-based entrepreneur with a background working in his family's tobacco business. In fact, Amir points out that an appreciation, passion and understanding for the finer things in life such as cigars and wine, is comparable to coffee – with factors like soil quality, climate and agricultural practice affecting the end product.

It was this notion that piqued Amir's interest in coffee about five years ago. When his wife brought home a Nespresso machine, the tea-drinking Amir, who had thought most coffee tasted burnt or bitter, decided to increase his knowledge on the topic. He soon noticed that the brews served in restaurants was, "99 per cent of the time", worse than what he had at home. Baffled, he immediately sought to learn where the best coffee comes from. "I discovered that there is a lot of

correlation between good coffee, good wine, good food and good tobacco. They are all very similar in terms of the terroir, for example," he says.

After visiting Harrod's and trying his first specialty coffee – a Hawaiian Kona – Amir got a taste for the finer stuff and decided he would "like to drink more of that".

"The idea to create a little company that buys the world's highest-graded coffees and puts them in capsules started off as a bit of self-indulgence."

With a holistic understanding of business thanks to his experience working with his family, Amir founded Difference Coffee Co. with the aim to source the best beans and make them easily available to others who appreciate good coffee.

"If you are a good manager, you know what you know, and you know what you don't know." Amir admits that at that stage, he knew business but was a novice when it came to coffee. As coffee is graded by licensed judges, Amir works with one such professional, Jonny England. A master roaster, Jonny is a Certified Judge for the World Barista Championship and World Brewer's Cup, and is a fully licensed grader. "He produces great roasts," says Amir.

With Jonny's well-calibrated palate and roasting expertise, and Amir's passion for sourcing the winning beans from the "Oscars of the coffee world" – competitions like the Kona Cupping Competition and the Cup of Excellence – Difference Coffee Co. is intent on ensuring only the best of the best reaches its customers.

"Coffee is a drink that so many people have and love each day; they have such a strong relationship with it. And that said, nobody knows anything about coffee, compared to wine," says Amir. He wants more people to know about specialty roasts. After all, he posits, if you're going to enjoy something every day, why not enjoy the best? Importantly, the coffee guru points out that this is beneficial for the people growing the coffee too. Higher-graded coffee estates generate more income, which in turn provides a better work life for the farmers who see the benefits and then have the means to operate more sustainably, for example, explains Amir. "There is so much going on in the supply chain."

And how does Amir define 'good' coffee? "It comes down to the beans, the roasting, the preparation... there are three key elements: freshness, taste and balance." ■

Coffee is scored by licensed judges based on attributes like flavour and aroma.

Only the tastiest coffees scoring more than 80 points are deemed 'specialty' and represent a mere 1% of the world's total coffee production.

Amir shares the 3 important factors to good coffee:

- 1. The terroir.** Much like wine, coffee needs exceptional soil and farming.
- 2. Roasting.** You need a roaster to unlock the coffee flavours. An expert roasts the green beans to balance the sweetness, the acidity and the bitterness.
- 3. The preparation.** Coffee needs to be extracted correctly and it needs to be fresh. That's why capsules work so well at home; they are sealed to prevent oxidation and allow for portion control.