

The Beginner's Handbook to Excellent Coffee

By, Colin Mansfield

When I was a 16 years old and a sophomore in High School, I got my first *real* job, and based on the title of this book, it probably won't surprise you to find out that it was at a coffee shop. It was a drive-thru coffee stand, to be precise. My time working at this establishment taught me many valuable lessons and showed me just how hard it is to run a business - and more specifically - just how grueling working in coffee can be. As a barista it wasn't too bad; as long as I treated customers well, made good coffee, and cleaned the stand everything was hunky dory. Watching the owners of the shop, however, gave me a new respect for what it takes to run a local coffee business.

The memory of my interview to work at that coffee shop will forever be etched into my mind. I parked my car, walked to the back door, and gave it a knock. My future boss greeted me - a tall, bearded guy who clearly knew his way around gym equipment - and shook my hand. He motioned for me to come in, then pointed at a stool and asked me to take a seat. His first question was obvious.

"Before we start, what drink can I make for you?"

"Um...I'll take a white mocha, please." I responded, stumbling over my words more than a liked.

As he pulled the espresso shots and poured the white chocolate into a cup he began asking me typical job questions. Yes, I have a car. Yes, I have a flexible schedule. No, I've never had an actual job before. Yes, I will memorize the menu by my first day.

"You don't know your way around coffee very well, do you?" He asked, suddenly.

"No, not really." I responded, a little bashful that he spotted this so easily.

"You know how I knew? You ordered a white mocha. Most of the time, people order a white mocha when then don't know what else to get, or don't get coffee very often."

He had hit the nail on the head. I had grown up around "coffee" my entire life - if you can really call Folgers in a standard drip pot coffee at all. My mom brewed this mainstay nearly every day, and I had little interest or concern for what the differences between an Americano and a Latte are. Coffee is coffee, right?

My time at this coffee stand started as a way to make money, but quickly turned into a job that changed my life forever. It was during my long, cold winter shifts that I experimented with pulling espresso shots for different lengths of time, and began to appreciate the slight variances in the taste as a result.

It was also during this time that I started running a coffee blog - but more on that later.

This book is for people who like coffee. If you're a coffee connoisseur already, this book may help you get back to the basics that made you love the drink in the first place. If you're new to coffee, or have only ever had it from a Keurig or your work coffee pot, welcome to the family. My hope is that by the time you're done with this handbook you'll have a greater appreciation for all the work that takes a bean and puts it in a fresh cup of coffee at your home or favorite cafe. And perhaps you'll pick up some tools on how to make your cup taste even better along the way.