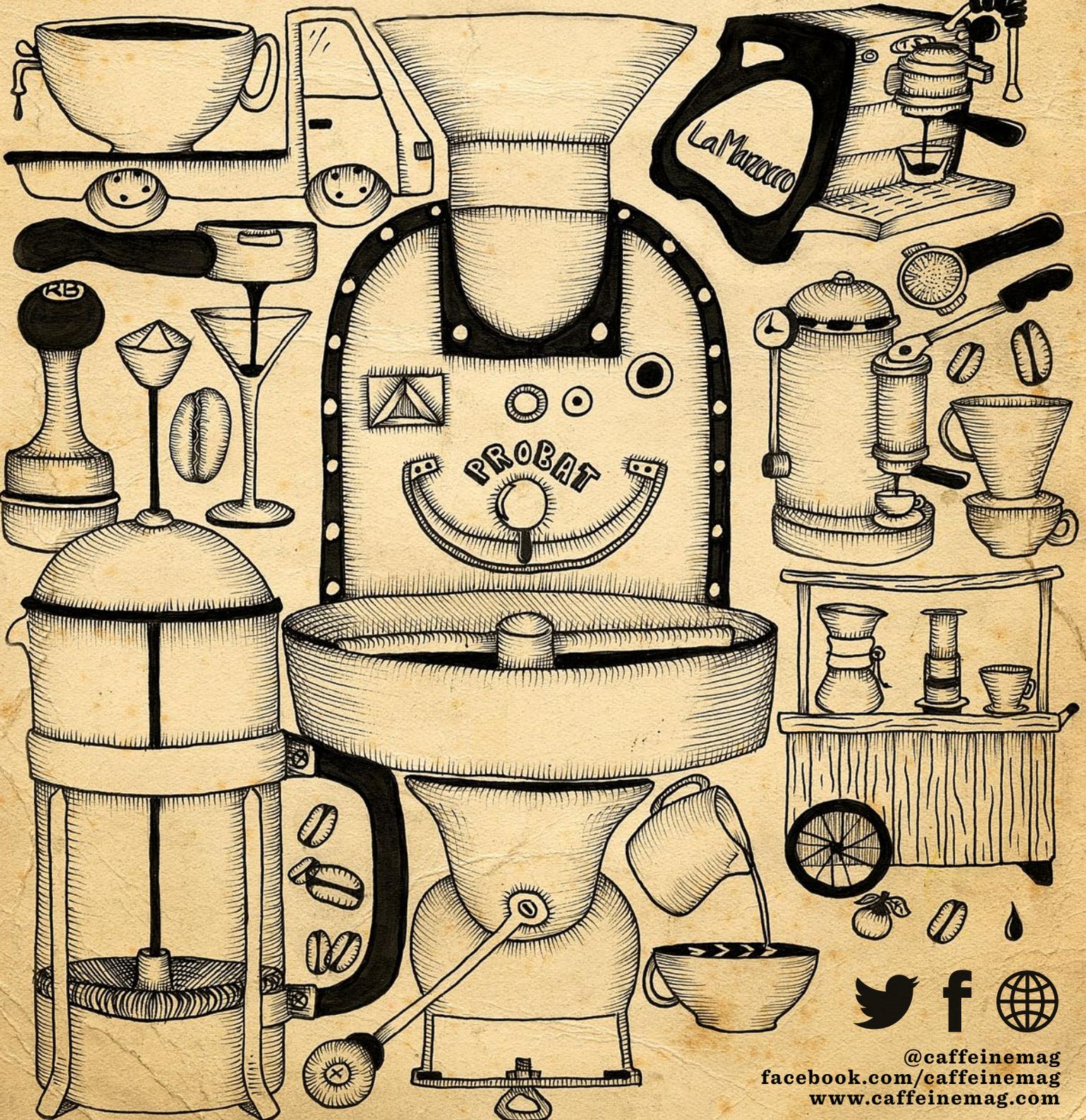


# Caffeine

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# THE Caffeine ESPRESSO TASTE TEST

Four of the most respected names in the coffee industry came together to 'blind taste' a selection of beans from UK micro-roasteries. Scott Bentley witnessed them at work

📷 BEN HUGHES



Everyone who frequents independent coffee shops will be familiar with names such as Square Mile, Has Bean, Union Hand-Roasted and Monmouth. These roasters are at the forefront of the speciality coffee industry, with the resources to access the best green coffee and with years of experience in extracting the very best flavours from their beans. As such, they are still the guys to be measured against.

However, with a new coffee shop opening almost weekly in London and ever more frequently throughout the UK, their owners and customers are looking for a point of difference, reflected in the steady but rapid growth of small-batch roasters. This new enthusiasm for coffee roasting has been facilitated in part by the London School of Coffee, which runs a three-day course on setting up a roastery and offers a new Speciality Coffee Association of Europe (SCAE) roasting qualification that is receiving a lot of interest from newcomers and established professionals alike.

Curious to know how this new crop of micro roasteries is shaping up against their more established counterparts, *Caffeine* decided to put them to the test. Strangely, some were unwilling to take part once they found out who was on our panel, but we managed to find 20 brave UK companies roasting under 1 tonne per month to send us a sample of their most interesting espresso to test.

## THE EXPERTS



**Andrew Tolley**

Andrew co-founded Taylor Street Baristas and Harris + Hoole. For the past eight years he has worked as a barista and trainer at Taylor Street as well as on the basic, intermediate and latte art courses at the London School of Coffee. He is a Q grader (professional cupper), Sensory Judge for the World Barista Championships and Head Judge for the UKBC. Andrew is also on the SCAE membership committee, working to develop a European barista guild.



**Lynsey Harley**

Lynsey is a green coffee buyer for Falcon Coffees, based in the Isle of Man, which focuses on sourcing green coffees for clients in the European and US markets. Lynsey served as National Coordinator for the Speciality Coffee Association of Europe until this summer, when she stepped aside to focus on her work with Falcon. She is a Q Grader, and 2012 UK Cup Tasting Champion.



**Howard Barwick**

Coffee Specialist and Training Manager at Grumpy Mule Coffee, Howard fell into the coffee industry by accident after working as a secondary school teacher. Having worked in branded chains, top independents (including managing the respected Opposite Coffee VQ in Leeds), and riding his luck in competitions, he now spends his days at the Grumpy Mule roastery in West Yorkshire or travels the UK and beyond on high-level coffee missions.



**Jamie Treby**

Roaster, trainer, barista, UKBC judge and all-round taste enthusiast, London-based Jamie has looked after the global event baristas at Ristretto as well as working as a consultant, roasting and opening numerous coffee shops for others. He is currently researching the craft beer brewing process to add another feather to his cap.



One tonne may seem like a lot of coffee, but many of the small-batch roasteries produce hundreds of tonnes a year and are still nowhere near the size of a commercial roaster. So, the companies that took part are still very much the “one-man-band” start-ups of the industry.

Andrew Tolley of Taylor Street Baristas kindly offered his training facility in Monument as the “testing chamber”, so our panel of testers had all the best equipment at their disposal, including a supply of reverse osmosis water – essential for cupping and extracting the best from the coffee. Espressos were pulled using the Nuova Simonelli T3 machines.

## ROUND 1: CUPPING

All the samples were put through the standard cupping procedure in two rounds. At the end of each round our panel of experts decided which coffees they wanted to take through to the espresso machines. The panellists found it fairly easy to eliminate several coffees early on due to clear defects, such as quakers (under-ripe beans that don't roast in full), and a few exhibited cues that point to poor roasting at the darker end of the spectrum, such as scorch marks and excessive oils. Rather disappointingly, a few also smelt strange, perhaps from being a little too darkly roasted.

From the chatter on Twitter and the coffee blogs you'd be forgiven for thinking that the espresso blend is dead and that everyone is roasting single-origin coffees,



but our panellists found that almost 75% of the coffee sent in for testing was a blend.

## ROUND 2: PULLING SHOTS

Once the panellists decided on a short list, they took the coffee to the next stage of testing. To make the espresso taste as good as possible within reasonable brew boundaries, they decided to establish a general starting point of an 18g dose (allowing +/-2g), and an extraction of a range of shots yielding 62-72% brew ratios (dose/espresso weight) to find just the right tasty shot.

During the tasting it was obvious that some of the coffees were fairly difficult to work with and get to balance, possibly due to a lighter roast showing well on the

**Sniff, slurp, savour**  
[Four industry experts blind test espresso from small-batch UK roasteries](#)





**Clockwise from top left:** Pulling shots on a WBC-sponsored Nuova Simonelli T3 espresso machine; the debates wind up; Howard takes one more sip just to make sure...

cupping table but not translating well into pulled espresso.

Three hours into the tasting, some of our judges were getting a little buzzed on caffeine, so we decided to make a call on their favourites. There were many interesting coffees to choose from in the taste test, so there was some spirited debate in how to select their top five from the different roasts sent in, which you can read about on the following page.

We hope they inspire you step out of any coffee comfort zones – these smaller roasters have incredibly tasty and unique products to offer that are obviously the result of real passion, dedication, trial and error, and long nights plotting roast curves with meticulous attention to all the nuances of finicky beans.

### Butterworth & Son 100% Espresso Four Bean Blend

The judges' decision was unanimous: the winning coffee in *Caffeine's* Espresso Taste Test is the Four-Bean Blend by Butterworth & Son.

The panel felt that this blend of Peruvian Tunki, Ethiopian Yirgacheffe Kochere, Columbian Villa Esperanza and Guatemalan Finca La Perla has very good balance with a nicely rounded quality. "The coffee had a wonderful complexity displaying different flavours at various stages," commented one. "We felt this had tastes of cocoa, black tea and a hint of fruit."

Butterworth & Son is a family-run business founded in 1976 in Bury St Edmunds, though its roots lie in the Victorian tea trade. Managing Director Robert Butterworth remembers his father bringing him into the shop

as a boy to pack bags of coffee. Here he learnt the origins and characteristics of coffees from around the world. Robert later started the wholesale side of the business from the basement and Butterworth soon gained a reputation for its quality teas and coffees. It then started to supply cafés and independent shops throughout Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex.

In 2000 Butterworth bought a Diedrich IR-5 roaster and soon after Thomas Howes, now head roaster, joined the firm. A trained illustrator, Tom's images adorn every bag, but it's his dedication to quality and consistency and his patient manner that has made him such a natural at the roaster.

If you're not in East Anglia and want to try a well prepared shot of Butterworth & Son, then head to London's Fleet Street Press where it's a house blend. *100% Espresso Blend, £6.95 for 250g, butterworthandson.co.uk*



## Round Hill Roastery Honduras El Chollo Espresso

Coming in a close second was Round Hill Roastery. This speciality coffee roaster is based in Radstock, a few miles south of Bath, where owner-roaster Eddie Twitchett is making a name for himself even though he's only been open for 18 months. Eddie's passion for roasting is all-consuming, inspired by many espressos pulled by super-barista Maxwell Colonna-Dashwood.

Round Hill is a regular guest in some of the best coffee shops in the UK, including Pink Lane Coffee in Newcastle, Colonna & Small's in Bath and in London at The Fields Beneath in Kentish Town and DunneFrankowski in Hoxton. Guest roasts make up 95% of Round Hill's sales, which is where he sees the future of speciality coffee shops. I've also intuited that they may not tie themselves to one brand, but will flit and cherry pick whatever is really delicious at the time.

Eddie buys with the growing seasons to offer flavours of the farm and favours the sweetest coffees on offer. This was borne out in the tasting: "We felt this coffee was sugary-sweet and bright but still well rounded," said one tester. "We got blueberry and floral notes from the espresso".

Round Hill generally sells to the public at the Bath farmers' market, but if you email and mention *Caffeine* he will sell you some. *Honduras El Chollo Espresso*, 250g, [info@roundhillroastery.com](mailto:info@roundhillroastery.com) [roundhillroastery.com](http://roundhillroastery.com)



## Coffee by Tate Hunkute Ethiopia

Although this is quite a difficult coffee to get right, when you do it really delivers on flavour. Our testers said, "We felt it needed to be heavily loaded and run on quite a tight extraction" and described it as "bright with tropical fruits and even rum".

Ben Presland is the head roaster for Coffee by Tate and you'll find him roasting coffee for all the cafés in the Tate Modern itself. A relative newcomer to the scene - he took the roasting course at the London School of

Coffee in 2011 with class mate Eddie Twitchett of Round Hill, left - Ben took delivery of a brand new 12kg roaster later that year. "Roasting isn't the dark art it's made out to be by some," Ben says. "It's all about constantly tasting and learning from your mistakes."

This year Ben teamed up with Maxwell Colonna-Dashwood to roast the coffee for Maxwell's entry to the UK Barista Championship, which Maxwell won in 2012 and placed second in 2013. Getting hold of Ben's coffees can be a hard job if you aren't able to visit the Tate's cafés, but some are available through the online gift shop. *Hunkute Ethiopia*, £6.00 for 250g, [shop.tate.org.uk](http://shop.tate.org.uk) or email [benjamin.presland@tate.org.uk](mailto:benjamin.presland@tate.org.uk)



## Smokey Barn Purple Ribbon Espresso Blend

Founded in January 2012, Norwich-based Smokey Barn Coffee Roasters wowed the panel with its Purple Ribbon Espresso Blend. I have to confess, terrible as it may sound, that I didn't initially hold much hope for a coffee brand called 'Smokey Barn', as images of cowboys brewing coffee in a tin can over a campfire or drafty old agricultural outbuildings came to mind. Now I admit to being completely wrong and am rather shamefaced. What

we experienced was a medium body with flavours of fudge, creamy chocolate, lemon and black tea. Quite delicious.

The inspiration behind this blend was the 'Turkish Delight' qualities that are often used to describe the Ethiopia Yirgacheffe Dumerso GR1, and to harness them to create a much more rounded and balanced espresso. To do this, the roaster added Colombia Finca La Cascada and Tanzania Peaberry Hope, which resulted in something far more diverse: a chocolate box selection of "cream centres", hence the name, "Purple Ribbon", in reference to gift boxes of specialty chocolates. *Purple Ribbon Espresso Blend*, £6.49 for 250g, from [smokeybarn.co.uk](http://smokeybarn.co.uk)



## Carvetii Seasonal Espresso Blend

Carvetii may sound Italian, but the name originates from a tribe of nomadic Celts who lived in Cumbria at the time of the Romans. Although the founders Angharad MacDonald and Gareth Kemble are Welsh, they both have nomadic and Celtic connections and set up shop in Embleton, Cumbria, so the name is fitting. Head roaster Gareth devotes most of his time to experimenting with roast profiles and brew techniques and keeping up with current roasting research.

We first noticed Carvetii at Ginger & White in Soho where it was a guest espresso, but trying to find coffee shops outside Cumbria that serve it is quite a tall order. This blend is Carvetii's first three-bean espresso and combines coffee from Guatemala (Finca La Bolsa Huehuetenango), Costa Rica (Finca San Luis) and Ethiopia (Sidamo), each roasted individually before being combined in equal quantities to create a well balanced espresso. The blend changes with the seasons, so if this sounds like your thing order ASAP! We really got the dark chocolate taste in this coffee from the South American beans and also detected a taste of green tomatoes, noted the testers. "It wasn't overly complex although it did exhibit a wonderful creamy softness." *Seasonal Espresso Blend*, £5.75 for 250g, [carveticoffee.co.uk](http://carveticoffee.co.uk)

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