

# Consistency... an everyday masterclass

INSIGHTS FROM LA SPAZIALE

This issue's tip -

## *How hot is your water?*



*Pictured -  
Jim Hoffman,  
La Spaziale*

*This series of articles has been created from many hundreds if not thousands of training days presented to baristas throughout the UK. We have presumed, that coffee bar owners are striving towards producing espresso-based drinks to the highest standard they can, because competing on price alone will only result in driving themselves out of business. Attention needs to turn towards quality and improving the standard of each drink produced.*

*We can only produce drinks of a high quality if we invest both time and effort in developing our knowledge and understanding of espresso coffee and the factors that affect it. The pay-back for such an investment will be passionate, motivated staff who want to learn more about coffee and discerning loyal customers who bring back daily trade.*

*Each article will look at a different parameter in the preparation of espresso-based drinks and how to practically maintain a level of excellence and consistency. Only through understanding every single part of the process can we produce consistently better drinks and also quickly diagnose and rectify any problems. Each one affects the result in the cup.*

*These articles are intended to help enhance your coffee knowledge, know-how and understanding. In addition, we would like to provoke thought and ask questions about those people who supply your coffee.*

Steve Penk, Director, La Spaziale UK

As a nation we are fickle about our tea. One man's perfect cuppa is another man's weak abomination. We all, however, agree on one thing - you should use boiling water to brew tea to get the best flavours. We understand that there is one temperature that is better for making tea.

Sadly we don't apply this same understanding to coffee, where the same is true, but in an even more pronounced way.

Coffee is full of hundreds of different flavours, but they are not all noticeable in every cup. Some of them are sour, some astringent, whilst others are bitter, or burnt. These are flavours we do not want to release from the espresso, and here, the temperature of the water hitting the coffee is vital, because every blend of coffee has its own unique sweet spot - a temperature where it gives up as many of its positive flavours as possible without releasing the negative flavours. The difference of only 1C can drastically alter the flavour of your espresso.

So the consistency of the water temperature is paramount in the preparation of great coffee and your equipment will be put to the test daily.

Most machines on the market use the water in their boiler as a source of heat, jacketing the pipe carrying the brew water and heating it on its way to the coffee. This means that every time you draw hot water for tea, the machine will refill with cold water, thus causing a variation in the temperature of boiler water, and in turn, a variation in the brew water. This means no consistency in your espresso- this is why one is fantastic, and the next poor!!

Another problem you may face is the occasional slow-bar situation, where the machine is stood idle for long periods of time. Here many machines tend to overheat and the brew head fills with steam - steam, being well over 100C, will overheat your coffee, bringing out a lot of bad flavours in your coffee. If your machine has been idle for a while and you remove the portafilter and run the water only to find steam pouring out, then you will always need to flush out your machine before it can make coffee again.

When it comes to consistency of brew temperature, some machines are simply designed to be more effective than others. If a machine is using a more stable heat source as its heat exchange - say steam for example - then the machine will make your life easier by giving you brew water of a consistent temperature every single time you press for a coffee.

(It is important to realise that steam as a heat exchange medium is different to steam in the group head. At no time does the steam come in contact with the coffee in heat exchange systems.)

*What's your practical espresso puzzle?  
Put it to the experts at La Spaziale  
- email the editor, [ianb@coffee-house.org.uk](mailto:ianb@coffee-house.org.uk)*