

Gourmet coffee bars: a caffeine-fueled comparison

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Whether a big chain or a tiny kiosk, great gourmet coffee shops get java drinkers juiced. A shop's success isn't determined by one specific factor; rather, it's a combo of the right atmosphere, culture, philosophy and--of course--coffee.

Stumptown Coffee Roasters

First opened: 1999 in Portland, Ore.

Type of shop: Coffee bars (and tasting annexes)

Locations: Nine, with 11 by the end of the year, in Portland, Seattle and New York; scouting for a Chicago spot

Customers: Creative types: musicians, artists, grungers

Biz philosophy: Founder Duane Sorenson's M. O. is to provide great coffee, educate consumers about it and treat employees well--no matter the cost

Price of a cappuccino: \$3 for 5 1/2 oz.

Order this: A cup of Costa Rica Helsar Reserva coffee--a blend of molasses and cherry jam with notes of raspberry, strawberry and lavender

The coffee cherry on top: Employee benefits include healthcare, a 401(k) and an on-duty massage therapist

Peet's Coffee & Tea

First opened: 1966 in Berkeley, Calif.

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Type of shop: Typical coffee shop: tables and booths, often frequented by seekers of free Wi-Fi

Locations: 193 in California, Colorado, Illinois, Massachusetts, Oregon and Washington

Customers: Early-stage and hard-core do-gooders

Biz philosophy: Quality and freshness (each type of coffee is individually deep-roasted in single-batch roasters), along with partnerships with global nonprofits to better coffee-growing communities

Price of a cappuccino: \$3 for 12 oz.

Order this: Dark chocolate mocha Freddo (their signature ice-blended drink) or a handmade three-berry scone

The coffee cherry on top: Twice-monthly guided coffee and tea tastings at local stores

Abraço

First opened: 2007 in New York City

Type of shop: Stand-up espresso bar

Locations: Just one

Customers: East Villagers (aka hipsters)

Biz philosophy: Hole-in-the-wall space, minimal menu and eclectic design put the focus on aroma and taste and create a micro-community. Owner Jamie McCormick greets locals by name

Price of a cappuccino: \$3 for 8 oz.

Order this: The olive oil cake is a customer favorite among Abraço's seasonal, homemade sweets, savories and small bites

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The coffee cherry on top: Uses Counter Culture Coffee beans and food items are sourced from the local farmers market

Intelligentsia Coffee & Tea

First opened: 1995 in Chicago

Type of shop: Coffee bars, and one café in Pasadena, Calif.

Locations: Six in Chicago and Los Angeles (along with roasting facilities) and a New York City training lab

Customers: Art-school grads and people who only own Apple products

Biz philosophy: Providing the complete coffee experience--excellent brew, skilled baristas, coffee education and sourcing the best green coffee--in a sleek, minimalist-design atmosphere

Price of a cappuccino: \$3.50 for 6 oz.

Order this: A Black Cat Classic Espresso (part of "Black Cat Project" to create the perfect espresso)

The coffee cherry on top: Staff trained to be "the most knowledgeable and skilled in the coffee industry," offering public tasting and education classes at each retail location

Blue Bottle Coffee

First opened: 2002 in Oakland, Calif.

Type of shop: Varies by location: espresso bar, cafés, espresso carts and a coffee kiosk

Locations: Seven in Oakland, San Francisco and Brooklyn, N. Y., two roasteries and three Northern California farmers market espresso carts

Customers: Unpretentious hippies

Biz philosophy: Founders tired of the " grande eggnog latte and the double-skim pumpkin-pie macchiato" and opened Blue Bottle for those interested in the distinct taste of freshly roasted coffee

Price of a cappuccino:\$3. 25 for 6 oz.

Order this: New Orleans-style iced coffee with a saffron and vanilla bean Snickerdoodle

The coffee cherry on top: Coffee roasted in vintage roasters, ground and brewed one cup at a time and served in compostable cups; one location has a pricey Japanese siphon bar (see this article)