

WAKE UP AND SMELL THE BEST OF THE BEST

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FOOD & DRINK

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A situation you might never have considered – you have gone out for a wonderful meal, the food has been delicious, the wine has been well chosen to complement it. To finish you order a coffee and... it is worse than the coffee you make at home. This was the situation in which Amir Gehl, founder of the Difference Coffee Company, found himself and so he decided to do something about it.

Coming from a long line of tobacco experts, Gehl has long been interested in the finer things in life. From cigars to wine, he has always had an innate desire to find and try the best, collecting fine wines and savouring experiences like his first taste of Louis XIII cognac in his late twenties. (Incidentally, this beverage behemoth has since become one of his many illustrious collaborators.)

But such partnerships are inevitable in the pursuit of the best, a reality many miles away from the brand's tentative starting point. "The coffee... was a mistake" laughs Gehl, describing the advent of Difference Coffee. "in fact, until quite recently I did not even like it!" In context, this about-face makes perfect sense: Gehl is Difference Coffee's target customer, someone who would like to drink coffee but has been left disenchanted after a number of bad experiences, even at some of the finest restaurants and hotels.

So he went where all London-dwelling gourmands eventually go: Harrods. Here he discovered speciality coffee, a grade of coffee which has undergone a rigorous testing procedure by trained experts and been ranked according to the '100-point system.' These coffees represent the finest of their kind. But what type to buy? Should he buy beans or ready-ground? Did he need an elaborate espresso machine to get the most out of this top-quality product?

This is where a vague idea became a stroke of genius – why not seek out the finest coffee, straight from the farmers, roast it himself, and create a range of unparalleled Nespresso capsules? The finest coffee in the simplest format possible. Difference Coffee was born.

After eighteen months of extensive research, Gehl had found suppliers for four of the very best coffees in the world - Jamaican Blue Mountain, Hawaiian Kona, Indonesian Kopi Luwak, and Panama Geisha. These were found by attending world cupping competitions (the process by which coffee is tasted and ranked) judged by a panel of coffee experts. Gehl took only the highest ranked. He collaborated with a pair of Quality Graders (Q-Graders) who established the optimum roasting process and, finally, he created the world's first Speciality Coffee Nespresso capsules.

Do not be fooled by the simplicity – Difference Coffee represents quality at every level. Once the best beans in the world have been roasted in the best possible way by a highly-qualified professional, it is recommended that you fill your Nespresso machine with Volvic water which has the right level of minerals to extract the best flavour from the beans. Your capsules are presented in a jewel-coloured, velvet-lined case – modelled on a chocolate box, because great coffee is a gift. Inside each you will also find information about the coffee's provenance and taste, printed on premium-grade paper from Winter & Company. Even the smallest details breathe quality.

And this extends to the vessel from which you drink your coffee. An early partnership with Harry's Bar – one of London's most elegant and sophisticated private members' clubs – brought the final piece of the vision to life. Harry's Manager Luciano wanted a vessel to reflect the decadence of the coffee itself and, if anything represents decadence, it is gold! The Difference Coffee cups are made of porcelain (necessary to retain the heat) by German company Walküre and plated with real gold. As Gehl himself says, "When you're dealing with the best ingredients in the world, you have to treat them with respect."

Despite this pursuit of the *crème de la crème*, there is no air of snobbery around Gehl and his product, merely a sincere appreciation of quality. Perhaps because, unlike wine, coffee still feels like something anyone can understand. Gehl himself is remarkably well-informed and talks with voluble enthusiasm when it comes to my trying of the coffee itself.

I taste the "Holy Trinity" of coffee – Hawaiian Kona, Jamaica Blue Mountain, and Wild Kopi Luwak. The Kona is like no coffee I have ever had – bright and fruity with a good level of acidity – this tastes like coffee which makes you want to get up in the morning. The Jamaica Blue is more traditional, with smooth tastes of hazelnut and chocolate, it feels like indulgence in a golden cup. My favourite, however, is the Kopi Luwak. Unlike many brands of this famous Indonesian coffee (the beans for which pass through a civet cat before they are collected), Difference Coffee's Luwak comes from wild cats, not caged ones. The intervention of the civet cat actually has an impact on the taste of the bean – the enzymes in its stomach removing some of the bean's natural bitterness. The result is full-bodied and slightly sweet, and leaves me with a deep understanding of why it is the most expensive coffee in the world.

No extortionate prices at Difference Coffee, however – Gehl is keeping his prices low for the time being, hoping his very reasonable Kopi Luwak prices will also tempt people to try something a little different. Does he have plans to expand, I ask? His response is definitive. "I will take it to the utmost limit that the beans will allow me to". Quality comes first. I would say that is the Difference Coffee motto.

You can find Difference Coffee at various locations around London. Head to their website <http://www.differencecoffee.com/> to find out more.

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