



Paul Jackson, Managing Director of Danes Gourmet Coffee, speaks his mind on official recognition of barista skills.

BUILDING — BARISTAS —

Paul Jackson discusses the nature of the Australian coffee industry, as it continues to grow at warp speed, with a new wave of roasters and baristas pushing for greater quality and higher standards.

As the specialty coffee industry in Australia goes through immense growth, the time has come to entertain the idea of formalising barista standards. Competitions such as the Danes Grand Barista Championship and the World Barista Championship have been demonstrating the wealth of barista talent, and showing an industry that is truly coming of age. These events have created a worldwide community of coffee professionals who are in the process of elevating the status of both coffee and the

people who serve it.

The jump in specialty coffee standards is already visible at the beginning of the coffee supply chain, at the farm level, where over the past 10 years a new wave of roasters has been embracing certifications such as Rainforest Alliance and Fair Trade. This desire to raise the coffee bar in Australia has been spilling through to every part of the process including the front end. Barista training has been growing in leaps and bounds, largely due to dedicated roasters taking an interest in their wholesale customers' café standards.

CREDIT FOR COFFEE CREATORS

If you're part of the specialty coffee community, you are part of a minority that understands the sophistication of coffee. Its unique characteristics make it as – if not more – complex than any other organic substance, such as wine or produce. This understanding of coffee's complexity is slowly reaching the mainstream thanks to passionate roasters and baristas who are dedicated to educating their customers about the importance of maintaining high standards in all parts of the espresso-making process.

The Danes Gourmet Coffee Institute was set up to provide the industry with the knowledge required for successful enterprise. Ultimately, however, the institute and other like-minded industry members will achieve a loftier goal: helping baristas to become viewed as respected craftspeople, such as sommeliers or pastry chefs.

There are already some Australian baristas who are taking it upon themselves to pioneer high standards and maintain the integrity of the coffee they serve. In time, high industry standards will eventually spread and this can only benefit the industry as a whole. Café owners will gain from the fact they are serving a consistently good product and customers will be able to enjoy the fruits of a fully matured industry that delivers great coffee across the board.



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FORMALISING COFFEE TRAINING

One way this goal can be achieved is through standardised coffee training. Not only will this increase the knowledge and profile of baristas – and have a huge impact on the overall level of coffee served in Australia – it will also serve a practical purpose.

The vast majority of café owners find that their biggest challenge is finding qualified staff to maintain the high standards required to be competitive. A uniform barista training standard in Australia would result in a higher level of skill among baristas as a whole and would assist with filling the huge demand for trained staff that continually exists.

CREATING OPPORTUNITIES

Part of the reason why it's so difficult for café owners to find and keep staff is that the majority of employees view the role of barista as a temporary option. The top baristas in Australia are those who have made it a career, but they've done

this without the opportunity to become accredited.

Creating a formal standard for baristas will give students a higher level of training and make it measurable. It will bring more clout to the professionalisation of the role and will demonstrate that becoming a barista is a genuine career option.

ACCREDITATION: IN THE INTERESTS OF THE INDUSTRY

The transient nature of the barista world is a major hurdle for café owners trying to create and maintain the high standards required to remain successful. The time has come for those in the specialty coffee world to move the role of barista up to the next level, and an accreditation system will create the necessary formal structure to achieve this.

Overseas, the Specialty Coffee Association of America and the Specialty Coffee Association of Europe have paved the way, thanks to their strong industry base. In Australia we have yet to create an industry body with the same level of

influence. Several individual Australians have, however, contributed to development and growth of the worldwide industry through involvement in the World Barista Competitions and to a more limited extent, in overseas associations.

The expertise exists here, and as a watcher of the industry for decades, I can see the industry is nearly at the point where we are ready for an accreditation system. Barista competitions have been a fantastic forum for knowledge sharing and it is up to the industry to now create more education and training opportunities and a formalised accreditation system, in order to increase barista standards across the board.

I look forward to the day when baristas are recognised for the expertise they bring to the machine. Coffee culture could not have grown into what it is without the passion and dedication demonstrated by our top baristas and it's time to recognise their skill, talent and expertise. The end result will be a more robust industry, with café customers able to enjoy high quality coffee in each and every café across Australia.