



Paul Jackson, Managing Director of Danes Gourmet Coffee, outlines what to look for in deciding what training institute is best for you.

Choosing a BARISTA COURSE

In any café business, it's up to the owner to set the standards required for a successful enterprise. Café owners need to take it upon themselves to learn not just the basics of commercial-level espresso making, but the nuances which separate good from great coffee.

If you're an owner or barista aspiring to manage or someday own a café, you'll need to embark upon a journey of ongoing learning. Setting and maintaining a high standard in the café that you manage or own can only be done if you're armed with the expertise required.

Enrolling in a barista training course is a great way to lay the foundations of your coffee-making skill base and expand your knowledge. Over the last decade, with the blossoming of espresso culture in Australia, many barista training courses have cropped up, so there are many options available if you're looking for formal training.

When selecting the right course to hone your skills and knowledge, there are several elements to look out for.

QUALIFICATIONS OF THE TRAINER

Good trainers are ones who have worked and who are still working in the industry as baristas, so they are exposed to top level coffee making and current trends. Find out who is teaching the course, and what their qualifications are. Have they run successful cafés? Have they competed in, or even won, barista competitions?

Ideally the trainer is someone who has pushed their own professional boundaries either in a competition or café setting.

RESULTS OF THE SCHOOL

Assessing the caliber of the baristas who've come out of the institute is one way to find out how effective a training program is. Do your research, and find out what their graduates have gone on to do. This is one way to determine whether a course is just there as a commercial enterprise, or whether it's part of an institute that's committed to arming its students for success.

ONGOING TRAINING

Although there is no formal apprenticeship or universal standard in place yet for baristas in Australia, a reputable institute will offer a full program. This will enable you to go far beyond the basics and continue your learning with the facility.

Look at a prospective school's range of courses and how far they are able to take a barista. If the only course they offer is a three-hour barista basics class, it may not be enough. There is so much to learn, and it's not realistic to expect that a half-day session will teach you all you need to know.

A true professional training institute will be able to provide training that will progress its students up to the standard of competing in a competition. They will cover all aspects of the espresso landscape. Once you embark on your voyage of learning, you will want to continually be able to access training, so ensure the institute you select will be able to deliver.

COURSE FORMAT

Find out how much training you will be undertaking. Is it a hands-on or just a demonstration-style course? The espresso scene, and techniques and knowledge that are part of it, are changing rapidly, so ensure the curriculum is up-to-date.

Ideally, a course should be a combination of theory and practical skills. Most students want to plunge into the practical side of things, but the theory will provide students with the background knowledge required to understand exactly what they're trying to achieve once they are on the machine.

MEASURING SUCCESS

Any serious barista training institute will be able to objectively quantify the important aspects of what it takes to be a good barista. Find out what, or any, method a school has in place for measuring its students' skill level. Ask whether they have an accreditation system. At Danes we have five levels, from beginner to maestro, for example, and we assess our students via an exam to ensure they are ready to progress to the next level.

With the absence of a formalised barista certification framework in Australia, it's important that any institute be able to quantify what its students are learning. As a student, this will ensure you have a gauge of what level you are at with your knowledge and skill base, and it will encourage you to progress.

LEARN FOR LIFE

Learning is such a large part of the specialty coffee community, so take the opportunity to progress your knowledge on an ongoing basis. In addition to providing you with the fundamentals, a great training program will do more than just teach you technical skills – it will teach and inspire you to provide great espresso drinks with outstanding customer service 100 per cent of the time, ultimately generating more business for your café.

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