

A BETTER BREW

everything you're overlooking about making coffee at home

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Coffee is a drink with incredible potential, and its “third wave” is the passionately nerdy movement that took it upon itself to tout artisanal qualities. Containing about four times more flavor and aroma-imparting chemicals than wine, coffee is one of the world’s most complex foods. With so much complexity, a great deal goes into a delicious cup – but luckily, to brew one at home, you only need a few basic things.

THE BEANS

This is the trickiest part. Better coffee shares a couple characteristics: It’s light or medium roasted, because lighter roasts retain more flavor (and

caffeine); and most is single-origin, because coffee, like wine, has its own terroir – a unique flavor depending on its varietal and where it was grown. But it ultimately comes down to the roasters – they’re the ones who determine the quality of the green (unroasted) beans they buy. Great coffee comes from direct-trade roasters, who buy directly from and work cooperatively with farmers. The best beans are a culmination of painstaking care at every step of the process, and direct-trade is marked by this conscientiousness. For example, though most coffee is batch-harvested by machine, direct-trade coffee is harvested many times, by hand, se-



lecting only the ripest beans. Transparency, sustainability, and quality are hallmarks of direct-trade coffee, and farmers' efforts are rewarded with prices of up to three times more per pound than fair-trade.

THE GRINDER

The world's greatest beans would be a waste without a good grinder. Coffee's flavor comes down to extraction: how many of the flavor compounds make it from the bean into your cup. Most home grinders cut with a blade, which haphazardly chops beans. When you brew, it's like pan-frying chunked and thinly-sliced potatoes together: some of the potatoes will be over-cooked and others under-cooked, and some of the coffee particles will be over-extracted (bitter) and others under-extracted (sour). Instead, use a conical burr grinder, which grinds your beans evenly.

You can choose from electric grinders (like the Baratza Preciso, which can double as an espresso grinder) or manual ones (like the equally beautiful and functional Red Rooster Camano Grinder). Unless you're brewing for a crew, grinding by hand isn't bad—one to two cups worth of beans takes less than five minutes. Always grind your coffee right before you brew. For the very best results, weigh your beans.

THE BREW METHOD

There's a guiding principle to brewing: Do it by hand. Con-

trolling the water's temperature, amount, and flow is key to good extraction. Automatic drip machines can't control water flow or keep water at the right temperature (195 to 205 degrees) to brew your coffee without either burning it or under-extracting it. They also get dirty over time: each cup is flavored with every cup you brewed before it. Manual brewing systems are incredibly affordable, simple to use and (bonus points) portable. The four most popular ones are the Chemex, the pour-over, the AeroPress, and the French press. No matter which brew method you choose, use filtered water for best results.

Once you have your gear, you can check out some coffee-brewing guides online (like stumptowncoffee.com) for the best results in your cup.

SOURCE NOTES:

To find great coffee, visit local third-wave coffee shops. Not only will they carry retail bags of whomever they use, but they'll also be a great source of information for other roasters to try.

- * For *Intelligentsia Coffee*, check out *21st Street Coffee and Tea* (21streetcoffee.com) and *Big Dog Coffee* (bigdogcoffee.net).
- * For *Counter Culture Coffee*, visit *Tazza d'Oro* (tazzadoro.net) or *Espresso a Mano* (espressoamano.com).
- * To try *Ceremony Coffee Roasters*, visit *Constellation Coffee* (constellationcoffeepegh.com).



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