

A really bright move – and it's all about coffee



Chef Jimmy Buscombe, left, with Brightbird Espresso owners Mark and Katrina Brightwell, who are taking coffee and donuts to a whole new level in their Warrnambool cafe.

By Carol Altmann

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DC943C;"] I [dropcap]f you want to see **Mark Brightwell** animated, get him talking about coffee.

Together with his wife, **Katrina**, Mark operates the highly successful **Brightbird Espresso** in Warrnambool (founding partner **Henry Bird** has since moved on to other ventures) which has developed a reputation for not just serving great coffee, but taking coffee drinkers on an adventure.

This means urging customers to not only try different coffee styles that go beyond the normal latte, cappuccino and short black, but to experiment with and learn about the beans themselves.

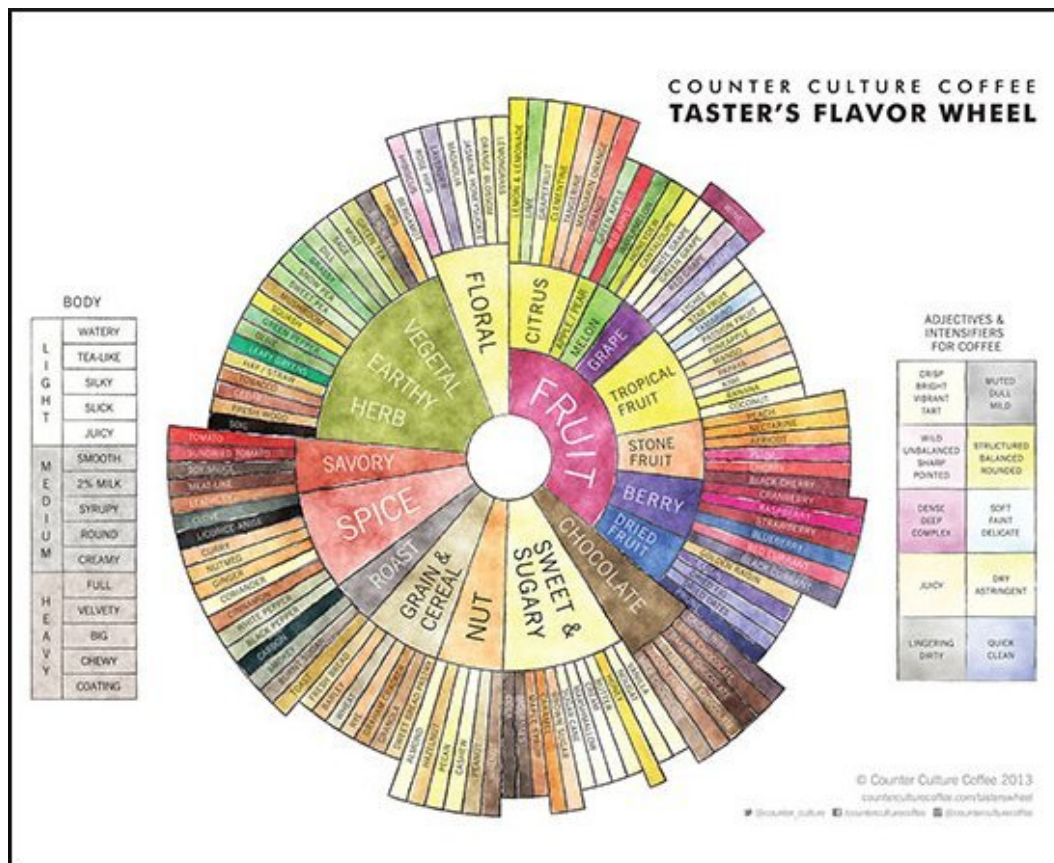
“We are pushing the boundaries and it is a big risk, but it is one we wanted to take,” says Katrina.

“That’s right,” adds Mark, “it’s about talking with customers about the coffee and educating them, teaching them, about the coffee.”

And there is much to learn.

As Mark explains, coffee drinking in Australia has followed a similar trajectory to wine, with a growing awareness of different coffee regions, the ethical and organic origins of the coffee beans, how they are roasted, brewed, and the ever-expanding range of flavours based on all of these elements.

Take, for example, this description of the cup character of the Yirgacheffe bean, grown in the Rift Plateau of Ethiopia: “Raspberry! Crispily but lushly sweet and fruit toned. Flowers, blueberry, peach. Softly crisp acidity: full, lively mouthfeel.”



Going way beyond 43 beans in every cup: coffee is now deserving of its own flavour wheel, based on the many varieties of beans and roasting techniques. Image: [Counter Culture Coffee](http://counterculturecoffee.com), US. 2013.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DC943C;"]Y[/dropcap>irgacheffe is one of the many varieties supplied to Mark and Katrina from **Cartel Coffee Roasters Australia**, a boutique coffee roaster based in Geelong that sources ethically grown, small-batch coffee direct from the farmers and their families in Ethiopia and Columbia.

Brightbird hooked up with [Cartel Coffee Roasters](http://cartelcoffee.com) about four months ago and Mark has been relishing the opportunity to bring a dash of inner-urban coffee culture to the country.

“Coffee bars are huge in Melbourne and we love to get down there, see what is happening and bring it back here to try,” he said.

“It is what keeps us interested and inspired because it is always changing and evolving. It keeps us fresh.”

[box] **Mark’s four essentials for a great coffee in a cafe:**

- 1. the quality of the beans**
- 2. the quality of the equipment (\$15,000 for an espresso machine; \$3000 for a grinder)**
- 3. the maker – well trained, passionate about coffee and able to work consistently well under pressure. [/box]**



The science of coffee: a slow filtered brew is served in individual glass beakers. Image: Bluestone Magazine.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DC943C;"] A [/dropcap]s part of the educational experience, Mark occasionally hosts “cupping” sessions on a weekend with the team from Cartel Coffee Roasters who give participants the equivalent of a wine tasting, except with different coffee beans and brews.

Coffee connoisseurs can sample and sip and savour the flavours that run from chocolate to fruit to spicy and earthy. They can also learn about different ways of brewing and serving coffee, from 12-hour, cold-brewed (delicious served chilled on an ice-cube) to slow-filtered coffee served in a tall beaker.

It is not surprising to find that Mark, who is British-born and has worked in hospitality his whole career, was once a sommelier and also worked in a wine store.

“I have done lots of things in my time in hospitality, but this is a new challenge for me – the focus has become the coffee and I find it fascinating,” he says.

It is also a way to keep Brightbird Espresso from ever becoming predictable. The cafe started four years ago when Mark and Katrina moved from Melbourne to Katrina’s hometown (she grew up as a Malseed, in Woolsthorpe) to raise their children.



Jimmy Buscombe sets out his donut

creations for the week – sold only on Thursdays, they have created their own following. Image: Courtesy of Brightbird Espresso.

[dropcap style="font-size: 60px; color: #DC943C;"]N[/dropcap]ot only has the cafe built up a loyal following in that time – including a couple of elderly gents on zimmer frames who have been customers for years – but its expansion into speciality coffee has attracted a whole new clientele.

Pairing the coffee with gourmet donuts, created by chef **Jimmy Buscombe** and served only on Thursdays, has also created somewhat of a frenzy.

“We have people almost elbowing each other out of the way to get to those donuts before they sell out,” Katrina laughs.

“There is no doubt that we are even busier than we were before...and there is still not a day that I don’t love coming to work,” Mark says.

[box]**Brightbird Espresso is at 157 Liebig St, Warrnambool. Find them on [Facebook here](#) and the [web here](#). Also keep an eye out for their small barista training classes. (The February class is already full.)**[/box]

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