

Java Jake's Way

PHOTO: George Mendel



Paul Masson may have coined the phrase about wine, but you can almost see Orson Welles sitting back with a cup of Jake's Java remarking about how this coffee is all about the timing.

And the owners of this new Peters Township-based direct mail coffee house think about coffee the way the finest vineyards think about wine. And only the freshest, best beans will ever see the roasting room in the home of Carl and Victoria (Vicki) Hauptmann. For it is there where they import unroasted green coffee beans from all over the world that they custom roast and ship out immediately to customers who order online at jakesjava.net.

"We date each bag of coffee beans we roast," explained Vicki Hauptmann, "So you always know exactly how fresh your coffee is." They order green beans by the 100-weight from coffee plantations as varied as Ethiopia, Mexico and Brazil, among others.

The business began as a hobby and a way for Vicki's son, Kevin Flack, and Carl to bond as father and step-son. "It was just a passionate hobby they have," said Vicki.

However, one man's hobby is another man's obsession, and a brief conversation with the Flack-Hauptmanns will make it clear that their coffee knowledge goes way beyond "automatic drip or percolator." Carl has been researching coffee plantations for the past decade, while Kevin is the coffee connoisseur. Vicki is the marketing department, and her other son, Colin, is an engineer by trade who is handling the company's inventory and ordering. They hope the business will take off, and they are offering incentives for customers who recommend others to them. While for now they all have day jobs, they hope the business will take off and their coffees will be sought after throughout the country.

Starting a family business is not particularly a new idea. However, being the

only micro-roaster in the South Hills sets this family business apart from the rest of the crowd.

That and the "cupping."

"Kevin is the cupping expert," Vicki said. "Different coffee places will send him samples; he takes the coffee grinds and tastes it, spits it out and then he reports on the quality of the note of the coffee."

That sounds both easier and more unpleasant than it is in reality. The procedure of cupping is quite elaborate, involving exactly measured grinds and precisely brewed water of exceptional quality.

According to virtualcoffee.com, the preferred method of cupping is to "slurp the coffee from the spoon with a deep pull. Let the coffee spray over your entire palate, allowing your taste buds to experience and recognize each flavor and nuance. Hold the coffee in your mouth without swallowing and swish it about. Some cuppers like to exhale through their noses while doing this. Finally, purse your lips and spit the coffee into another vessel whose sole purpose is for discarded samples."

"I cup on average 30 to 40 coffees each month in search of finding one exceptional coffee for us to offer to our customers," Flack explained. "My step-father and I have been home coffee roasters for nearly ten years. We turned a hobby that we both thoroughly enjoyed into a business doing something that we both love to do."

But what about the taste? Refined, exceptional, unique. The variety offered at jakesjava.net is quite extensive and the prices comparable to grocery store bean prices. Most of their coffees retail for \$12-\$15 per pound. They plan on offering a discount for repeat buyers, for example those who automatically reorder the same amount each week. And they offer a money-back guarantee, but chances are shoppers won't need it. □

Brewing the perfect cup of coffee is both an art and a science. Use these tips, courtesy of Jake's Java:

Storage – Store your coffee in a sealed container. Do not refrigerate or freeze the coffee. This will not keep your coffee fresh, but it will make your coffee taste like the inside of your freezer.

Grinding – Wait until just before brewing to grind your beans in order to maximize the flavor. Don't grind more than you'll need for one pot of coffee.

Buying – Buy smaller quantities of beans more often; coffee is best consumed within three to four weeks of roasting the beans, not based on when those beans are ground.

Water – Use good quality water at a temperature of between 190 and 200 degrees. Highly processed water will impact the flavor of your coffee so avoid them.

Coffee Maker – Invest in a high-quality model, such as one made by Cuisinart. Vicki Hauptmann's favorite is the "Grind & Brew" that retails for \$129.99 in many stores, although other good models can be found for less than half this price.

There are many different ways to process coffee beans. Here are a few different options offered by Jake's Java:

Wet Processed—Most common in Central and South American coffees, it produces a clean, uniform cup with more acidity, less body and without a strong aftertaste. The parchment coffee (which is basically the seed of a coffee cherry with the silverskin still attached) is stripped of its parchment through a milling machine and then the green beans are dumped into a vat of water and allowed to ferment for a certain period of time so the mucilage (which is a small layer of skin that is left on the beans after the parchment is stripped) can be removed.

Dry Processed—Most common in Brazil, Africa and Indonesia, dry processed coffees in general produce a fruity cup, with more body, less acidity, without uniformity and a long, lingering aftertaste. In dry processing the coffee is laid out in the sun to dry with its fruity mucilage layer still intact (which gives the coffee more of a fruity flavor) and then once dry, the whole lot of coffee is sorted for defects and then graded for export.

Pulp Processed—Most common in Brazil and El Salvador, pulped natural coffees use both wet and dry processing combined into one technique. The mucilage coffee is laid out to dry, then after a certain moisture content is reached the beans are put into water to ferment. These coffees tend to have good acidity, good body and a short aftertaste.