



PHOTOGRAPHY: PEABERRYS; HUBRO; CREMA COFFEE; GARRAGE; DARKS COFFEE; ROASTERS

HOME TO ROAST

THE DAILY GRIND JUST KEEPS GETTING BETTER IN NEWCASTLE »

WORDS SARAH GAMBONI



Perfect pick-up



Newcastle has come a long way – and nowhere is that more apparent than the local coffee scene. Novocastrians don't have to cast their minds too far back to a time when a standing coffee order was a mug of cappuccino piled high with over-frothed milk. But just as this NSW coastal enclave has transformed from industrial hub to cosmopolitan city, so too has its café culture evolved. And a crop of boutique roasters now caters to the community's thirst for high-quality beans and alternative brews.

Adrian Rigon, founder and head roaster of Peaberrys Coffee Roasters, grew up with caffeine flowing through his veins. His family moved to Newcastle from Melbourne in the '90s to start a coffee wholesale business, at a time when espresso was still something of a novelty.



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“There would have been six espresso machines in Newcastle at the time, and no one had a coffee grinder,” Adrian says. “My first job was grinding hundreds of kilos of beans – I’d be jumping off my dial just from the aroma of coffee in the air.”

Inspired by the café cultures of Melbourne and Italy, he recognised a gap





CLOCKWISE: Newcastle's transforming from industrial to cosmopolitan, Darks Coffee Roasters, Trent Alder and Adam Hills of Darks, bags of beans at Peaberrys, Peaberrys' nitro brew.



in the market for locally roasted beans and opened Peaberrys in 2000. "I guess I was a bit ignorant and arrogant, but I believed the local market wanted something better," he says.

Over the past 18 years, Adrian has witnessed firsthand the local shift in attitude towards coffee. "Today, the expectation of high-quality coffee is very apparent," he says. "It's still largely a 'coffee with milk' town, but there's a growing number of people looking for alternative brews, like our cold brew and nitro brew, and those who appreciate single origins and the different flavour nuances."

Adrian believes the

local industry has been boosted by baristas and roasters who've returned to Newcastle following stints interstate and abroad. "They've brought back all their experience, their passion and their skills, and Newcastle is flourishing as a result."

Two of those prodigal sons are Trent Alder and Adam Hills, who cut their teeth in Melbourne, the Hunter Valley and Canada before moving back to Newcastle and opening Darks Coffee Roasters three years ago. "When we were younger, there wasn't a lot of opportunity in hospitality here, so we headed to Melbourne, which was



considered the coffee capital of the country," Trent says.

During their time away, Newcastle underwent significant redevelopment, shaking off its industrial past to reveal a thriving hub of

world-class beaches, bars and eateries. "I think a lot of people who moved away have realised the potential and are moving back, and with that comes a wealth of knowledge and experience," Trent >>



Did you know?

On 25 May, 2004, Jetstar's inaugural flight took off from Newcastle, bound for Tullamarine in Melbourne, Victoria.

says. "There's a specialty coffee scene that wasn't here five years ago."

Is Newcastle at risk of being drowned in boutique brews? Trent doesn't seem to think so. "There's a real thirst for local produce," he notes. "We're seeing less of the big companies now, so there's room for us smaller guys – we all look out for each other and we can all make our mark without stepping on each other's toes."

Another familiar face on the local market is Retro Kombi Co. Mark and Sara Howell have kitted out a VW Kombi van with an espresso machine and taken their 'roaming barista and bar' on the road, serving coffees and cold brews

made with beans from Glee Coffee Roasters.

The olive-green vintage van named Olive can be hired for weddings and events, and keeps students at the University of Newcastle caffeinated during study breaks. You'll also spot 'Olive' at The Fernery, a new arts hub in the hip suburb of Islington.

The Fernery is the brainchild of Angela, Rowena and Juliana Foong, the trio behind local fashion label High Tea with Mrs Woo. The sisters, together with their husbands, have created a community hive that hosts workshops, play dates and a fleet of food and coffee trucks.

When chatting to Matthew Pointon of



TOP TO BOTTOM: Retro Kombi Co at The Fernery, coffee meets art at Darks.

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I'd worked in Sydney and London, but we all come home to breed

Silverskin Coffee Roasters you realise just how supportive the local community is. When the lease on his warehouse came to an abrupt end, Matt had just three days to find a new location.

"Within two hours of receiving the bad news, the Darks guys handed over the keys to their >>



CLOCKWISE: Barista Miss, Apothecary Kitchen, on the menu at Hubro.



We've seen a big shift in what locals are looking for

warehouse and let me roast on the days they weren't using it," Matthew says. "If it weren't for them, my whole business would have collapsed."

Matthew, another born-and-bred Novocastrian, returned to open Silverskin in 2012. "I'd worked in Sydney and London, but we all come home to breed," he says.

"There's a really lovely coffee scene now, and there's more interest in single-origin beans, farmers and roasts," Matthew says. "I regularly get asked about the sustainability and ethics of our coffee – five years ago, people couldn't care less."

Sustainability is at the heart of Sprocket Roasters, which is home to the only coffee roasting machine in the world run entirely on biofuels. Ross Ciavarella and Chelsea D'Aoust came to Newcastle from Canada,

and teamed up with John Winter to launch a carbon-neutral roaster.

"People are starting to take more notice now," Ross says of their carbon-conscious coffee. "We've seen a big shift in what locals are looking for: they care for the environment and are asking for single-origin beans. They're more educated and their palate has matured." ✈

Travel Info

Jetstar has great low fares to Newcastle from all major cities.

To book, visit JETSTAR.COM

Newcastle's best beans

DARKS COFFEE ROASTERS

Sample single-origin brews, plus toasted sandwiches, pastries and salads. 45 Watt Street, Newcastle and 301 Turton Road, Broadmeadow

PEABERRYS COFFEE CELLAR DOOR

Sip cold drip and nitro brew while you watch beans being roasted. 81 Maitland Road, Islington

CREMA COFFEE GARAGE

Order a cold brew or smooth latte at this boutique roaster, which also offers coffee-making equipment and barista courses. 62 Broadmeadow Road, Broadmeadow

HUBRO

Try the signature HuBrew cold brew, along with smoothie bowls, toasties and smashed avo. Shop 1A/295 Darby Street, Bar Beach

APOTHECARY KITCHEN

Iconic Newcastle café Three Beans Espresso has become Apothecary Kitchen, showcasing wholefoods and fermented fare, including housemade ginger beer and kombucha, along with a weekly rotation of single-origin coffees. 103 Tudor St, Hamilton

DOOR 34

Grab a Silverskin coffee from the takeaway window of this cute café. 34A Kelton Street, Cardiff

FIFI LA FEMME

Enjoy Silverskin's espresso while you snack on cupcakes and macarons at this pretty bakery. Level G and Level 2, Charlestown Square, Charlestown

DARK HORSE ESPRESSO

Prop yourself up against a milk crate at this gritty warehouse café to sample Darks Coffee Roasters' beans in an iced latte or silky flat white. 24 Greenway Street, Wickham

BARISTA MISS

At this locally focused café, order an expertly pulled espresso and buy bags of Darks beans to go. 79 Regent Street, New Lambton

MAMA-P

Tuck into virtuous smoothie bowls or salads and Darks coffees topped with organic coconut or almond milk. 142 Pacific Highway, Charlestown

JOSIE COFFEE

Keep an eye out for the Josie Coffee caravan at markets around town, or shop online for its single-origin beans, blends and reusable coffee pods. Refer to josiecoffee.com.au

