

# FAITH WILLINGER\*

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I'm very lucky. I live in Florence. I moved to Italy over 25 years ago and discovered that I had to learn all about Italian food and wine. I studied with professional chefs and home cooks, traveled back-roads looking for artisans who hand craft the best products, prepare the best food, make the best wine. I write about these people and their products in "Gourmet", "Food & Wine", "Travel & Leisure", "Food Arts" and "Departures". I want my readers to taste it all.

## Taming the Coffee Bitch

When I visit the U.S. and attempt to order coffee, my friends call me the coffee bitch. I long for a decent cappuccino or espresso, but am rarely satisfied. I complain about over-roasted coffee, poorly prepared espresso, improperly steamed milk. Sizes mystify me - in Italy it's a single or double. Latte is milk. So I was thrilled to be invited to attend a three day program for technical coffee professionals at the Università' del Caffè' at the illy factory in Trieste. I would learn everything about coffee, with international attendees from Brazil, Nepal, Malaysia, India, Korea, Herzegovina, the U.S. and more. Moreno was our instructor, Giorgio and Michele our expert bariste. We began with beans, where and how they're grown, and learned how defective beans (stinkers) are identified and eliminated. We spent big time on the difference between Arabica-grown at higher altitudes, more expensive, lower in caffeine, better flavors, and Robusta-easier and cheaper to grow, weak aromas, bitter flavors. We discussed roasting and blends from different countries. We were told about the health benefits of espresso-as a vasoconstrictor it helps headaches and bronchial asthma, increases alertness, speeds up reflexes, inhibits the adhesion of sugar-rich food to teeth, lowers bile, inhibits the formation of gallstones, and much much more. We focused on espresso methods (140 variables!) and I learned about pressure, 1.5 for the stovetop moka, 9 bars for machines, necessary to make the emulsion known as crema. To make a perfect espresso 7 grams of coffee are tamped flat in the filter basket with 20 pounds of pressure, 25 seconds of extraction, water temperature at 90 C. Perfectionists like Giorgio and Michele brush the filter with a little brush after each espresso, something I've never seen in a coffee bar anywhere. Everyone was interested in the hands-on session, especially the milk foaming technique-water expelled from wand, then barely immersed next to the side of the filled-to-half metal pitcher of whole milk, full steam, tip lowered when milk spins into a whirlpool, temperature no higher than 65 C. The end result is velvety, thick, not separate hot milk topped with meringue-like foam. Giorgio and Michele taught everyone to make designs for fancy cappuccino-hearts, leaves, intricate patterns with chocolate syrup.

I'm no longer the coffee bitch-no use complaining about all the mistakes that I'm now aware that the barista is making. I've got a great new machine at home-the iperespresso. I've stopped ordering espresso and cappuccino unless it's illy...or I'm in front of a skilled barista, rare but not impossible to find. One of my favorites? Andrea Spella in Portland, Oregon. Let me know about yours?

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