

These artisan Lexington coffee roasters

A BATCH



Small-batch roasters such as Magic Beans, which operates a Cup of Common Wealth, right, use specially sourced beans.



are elevating your average cup of Joe...

AT A TIME

By Louis Guida
Photos by
Jonathan Palmer



If small-batch roasting helps define coffee worth drinking, then Lexington and the Bluegrass have a seat at the bar.

It's true that market shelves here, and across the nation, remain stacked with national and international brands, from household standards like Folgers to upscales like Starbucks and, now, even third-wave trendsetters like La Colombe. And it's true that a local wholesale roaster, Lexington Coffee & Tea, gained a niche in the 1980s and is still thriving.

But, wide distribution and local wholesaling aside, in the past decade a growing number of small-batch coffee roasters have arrived here. Like craft brewers and bourbon distillers or artisan beer cheese makers, these micro roasters are gaining a foothold in the market and starting to influence local food and drink culture.

CAFFE MARCO

A 2006 startup, Caffe Marco is the dean of small-batch roasters in the region. Owner Mark Newberry began the business about two years after he moved to Lexington from Northern California, where he had owned a small wine brokerage, been in publishing, and “lived a Bohemian life.”

Newberry, who grew up in Cincinnati, said “roasting coffee for a living was not really on my mind when I got here.” But he couldn't find coffee in Lexington comparable to what he had enjoyed in California. There, he remembered

the lauded Graffeo Coffee Roasting Company in San Francisco's North Beach as a gold standard and “very much an influence.” So, he formed an LLC here, purchased a

12-pound capacity Primo roaster for \$10,000, and began roasting his own coffee in rented commercial kitchen space in nearby Clark County and selling it at the Lexington Farmers' Market.

In 2009 he bought a one-story 1880 building on Main Street in Paris in nearby Bourbon County and moved his business there. (He now lives in rural Bourbon County.) Since its Paris opening, Caffe Marco has been a mainstay in the area's artisan coffee scene. Newberry, who said he knew how to market a product

QUOTE:
“This isn't a job. I enjoy coffee.”



Mark Newberry took inspiration from coffees he enjoyed in California to start Caffe Marco in 2006.

from his days in the wine brokerage business, focuses on creating blends and selling “a brand, not individual coffees.”

PROFILE: Beans from an Oakland, California, broker. Roasts 400 pounds a week in his original Primo. Offers fair trade and organic light, medium, and dark blends and a decaf.

No retail cafe but served at various area locations.

WEBSITE: www.caffemarco.com

MAGIC BEANS

A roaster with a collective mission, Magic Beans is part of a Lexington LLC owned by partners Salvador Sanchez, Joseph Will, and Allen Warford.

The company's flagship is A Cup of Common Wealth, a popular downtown cafe, and includes Chocolate Holler, a chocolate and coffee bar opened earlier this year on Old Vine. Warford said the partners came from different paths. Sanchez, who operates the cafe, worked at Water Street Coffee Joint in Kalamazoo, Michigan, founded A Cup of Common Wealth in 2013, and acquired Magic Beans last year from one of its 2012 founders. Will, training director, worked in wine shops in the region. And Warford, marketing and wholesale director, has an architecture degree from the University of Kentucky.

The company, which has 24 mostly part-time employees, is "about way more than coffee," Warford said, and is driven by a mission — embrace community, serve others, create culture — inscribed on a wall of its cafe and detailed on its website. "We're in the people business serving coffee." Magic Beans' "roasting studio" is a small, rented space in the Bread Box complex in downtown Lexington.



Magic Beans co-owner Allen Warford, in the roasting studio, said the company is in the "people business."

QUOTE:

"At the end of the day, we're about our pillars, but we love coffee too!"

PROFILE: Beans from a Minnesota importer. Roasts 250-300 pounds a week in a 37-pound capacity fluid-bed Sivetz. Offers single-origins: light, and fair trade and organic medium, dark, and decaf. Served at A Cup of Common Wealth along with Water Street coffees and other area locations.

WEBSITE: www.magicbeanscoffee.com

An advertisement for Sallee Horse Vans. The background is a light, textured surface with a large, dark silhouette of a horse in mid-air, as if being ridden. In the foreground, a white Sallee horse trailer is shown from a front-three-quarter view. The trailer has "Sallee" and "1604" written on it. The text "WE Move YOUR FUTURE" is written in a mix of serif and script fonts. The Sallee logo is in green. At the bottom, contact information is provided in white text on a black background.

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A BATCH AT A TIME



Roasting transforms green beans into aromatic brown ones.

WAVES

As coffee has become more popular and widespread, particularly in the United States, its history and development are being increasingly deconstructed and interpreted within different stages, or waves. Defining the waves has been much debated and somewhat elastic. But here's a generally accepted generic view:

First wave, tracing to the 1800s, expanded consumption exponentially. Vacuum packed, automatic drip, Folgers, Maxwell House, Mr. Coffee. *Second wave*, a reaction to first wave, was about coffee as more than a beverage, specialty coffees, and the social experience of coffee. Espresso, latte, French press, coffee shops, Starbucks. *Third wave*, which entered the lexicon around 2002, has been about origin coffees, the terroir (as in wine) of beans, artisan production, direct trade (buying directly from a grower), and sustainability. As for a *fourth wave*, its existence or future is an open question that Tyler Tate, the founder of the online coffee marketplace Crema.co, defined, in an April Fools' post this year, as roasting one bean at a time!

THE BIG CUP

No one knows who first drank coffee — one legend makes it a ninth-century Ethiopian goatherd — but evidence indicates the coffee plant originated on the Ethiopian plateau. Its beans may have been chewed as a stimulant by the 6th century or earlier, but it was probably not generally consumed as a drink before the 10th century.

From Ethiopia, coffee likely spread to Yemen, perhaps through Sudanese slaves being brought across the Red Sea. By the 16th century it was being cultivated in Arabia and was widespread in North Africa, the Middle East, Turkey, and Persia. By the 17th century, it had reached Europe — where the first cafe opened in Rome in 1645 — and India, and by the 18th century Indonesia and the Americas. In 1824, in the United States, Thomas Jefferson called it “the favorite drink of the civilised world.”

Coffee — whose etymology traces from the Dutch *koffie* and Turkish *kahve* to the Arabic *qahwah*, (which may have originally meant “wine”) — is now drunk at a rate of more than 2.54 billion cups a day worldwide. It's grown in more than 50 countries, almost all of them along an equatorial zone (“the bean belt”) between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn, and is a major commercial crop in Central and South America, East and West Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and Asia. Brazil, the world's largest producer, exported 2.85 million tons of coffee in 2015-16.

Coffee has become a global commodity, with a trading value second only to oil. The industry supports an estimated 25 million families, most of them in developing countries. Past working conditions were often exploitative. Fair trade, intended to guarantee

farmers a minimum price and create long-term sustainability, began in the late 1980s, though recent academic studies have found it hasn't worked and hasn't helped the poorest growers and poorest producing countries.

There are two important commercial coffee species — Arabica, which grows best at higher altitudes, brings the highest prices and is lower in caffeine and more aromatic than the heartier Robusta — that account for numerous varieties of trees. It takes three to four years for new trees to bear fruit, called cherries, which are harvested, usually by hand. After harvesting, the cherries are processed (either by a dry or wet method) to remove skins, pulp, and mucilage from their seeds, or beans, which are then hulled; polished; graded and sorted for size, color, and quality; and packed as green coffee in 60-kilo (about 130 pounds) jute or sisal bags for export.

Roasting transforms green beans into aromatic brown ones by removing their moisture and pyrolyzing their sugars. Though it can be done in a pan over a flame, as a goatherd might have, most roasting now occurs in machines at controlled temperatures between about 400 and 475 degrees Fahrenheit for about 12 to 15 minutes, depending on the roast — light, medium, or dark — and the roaster. (There are two types of roasters: drum, the most common, roasts beans by direct heat to a rotating cylinder; and fluid-bed roasts them over super-heated air.) When a desired roast is achieved, the heating process is stopped and the machines quickly cool the beans. If the end coffee is not a single-origin, beans can be blended before or after roasting. And after roasting, freshness is everything, and the sooner a coffee is consumed, the better.

CHERRY SEED

The newest and smallest roaster in the region, Cherry Seed is the realization of a dream of owner Lacey Nguyen.

A Lexington native, Nguyen became passionate about coffee and its culture while living in Burbank, California, where she was a makeup artist. When she returned to Lexington in 2012, she said she “wanted to bring something different here” and start her own company. “I decided the best way in was roasting coffee.” Last year, after months roasting in her parents’ laundry room, she formed an LLC, leased commercial kitchen space, and began creating roast profiles and a brand identity and selling at the Lexington Farmers’ Market.

At the market she met Luke Gifford, who said he was “blown away” by Nguyen’s coffees and who dreamed of owning his own coffee shop. Gifford, a Virginia native, was in the insurance business in Lexington. Last year he bought a building in the city’s Southland neighborhood for his coffee shop and invited Nguyen to set up her



Cherry Seed's Lacey Nguyen sells at the Lexington Farmers' Market.



QUOTE:

“I want to provide a quality product that can bring you a bit of joy with every sip.”

business in a back room. The two became business partners and this August opened Cherry Seed Coffee House and Roastery.

PROFILE: Beans from three different importers. Roasts 50-100 pounds a week in one-pound capacity US Roaster, which Nguyen will soon upgrade to a 10-pound capacity one. Offers light and medium single-origins, one of them fair trade and organic. Served at Cherry Seed Coffee House and also at the farmers’ market from a three-wheel mobile trike.

WEBSITE: www.cherryseedcoffeeroastery.com



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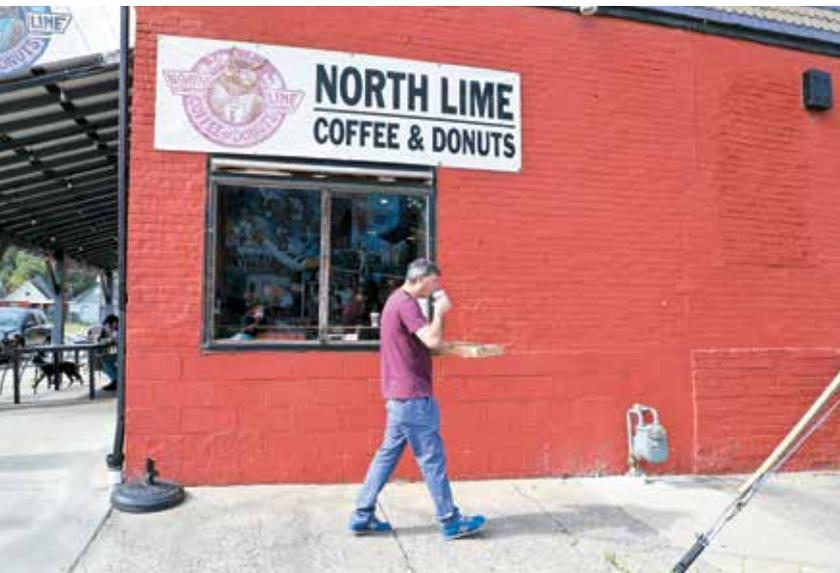
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A BATCH AT A TIME



Nate Polly, who supplies coffee to North Lime Coffee & Donuts, roasts the beans in warehouse space shared with Country Boy Brewing.

NATE'S

The largest volume small-batch roaster in the region, Nate's Coffee was created by a man with a passion for coffee and the experience to back it up.

Nathan Polly, a Lexington native, knew early on he would own his coffee business one day. "When I was in high school, I wrote my first business plan — for a coffee shop," he said. He managed stores for American Eagle Outfitters and other companies here for about two years, then went to work for Starbucks, managing and opening multiple locations in Lexington and the region. After seven and a half years he enrolled in what is now Bluegrass Community and Technical College and earned a business marketing and management degree.

In 2012 he sold his Starbucks stock, formed an LLC, bought a used 10-pound capacity Ambex roaster, and set up a part-time operation in his parents' garage. He soon began supplying coffee for and managing North Lime Coffee & Donuts in downtown

Lexington. In 2015, helped by a Kickstarter, he bought a new 30-pound capacity Ambex and moved his by now full-time business to a 1,500-square-foot space in a warehouse shared with Country Boy Brewing near downtown. (The companies have collaborated on several beers.)

Polly, who said he builds his brand around "inventiveness" and distinctive coffee varieties from around the world, has one part-time and two full-time employees. This spring he opened a retail store and cafe on Lexington's National Avenue in partnership with La Petite Délicat, a boutique macaron bakery. **KM**

QUOTE:
 "The uniqueness of an individual bean is what excites me."

PROFILE: Beans from two to three sourcing companies. Roasts 500 pounds a week in his Ambex. Offers 9-13 light, medium, and dark single-origins and blends, some of them fair trade and organic. Served at his National Avenue cafe and other area locations.

WEBSITE: natescoffee.com



Polly uses distinctive coffee varieties from around the world.



Polly's most recent venture is a retail store and cafe on National Avenue.