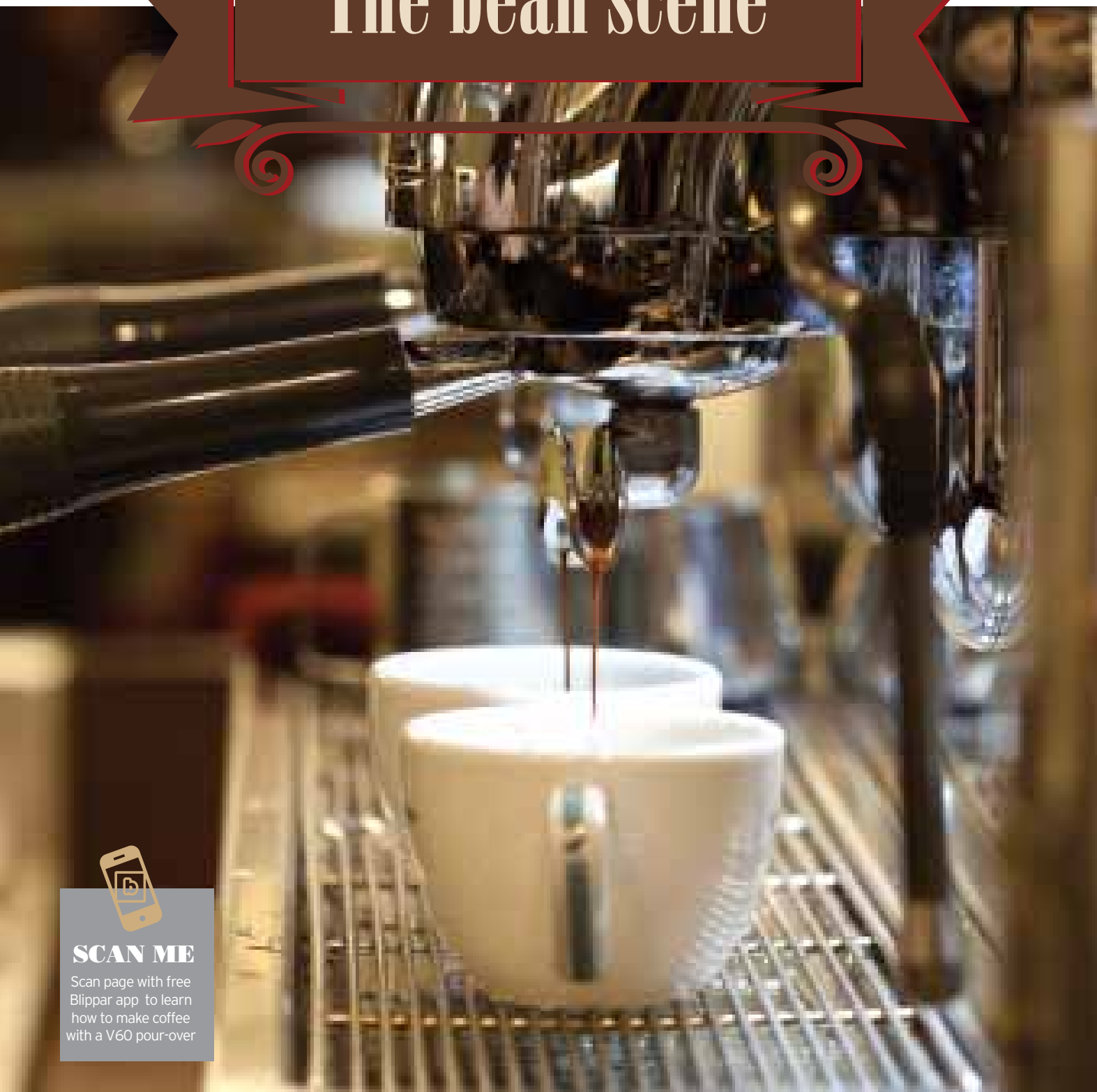


The bean scene



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London's coffee culture is evolving so fast that our taste buds can barely keep up, reports **Rose Dykins**

Over the past few years, artisan cafés have started popping up around the capital to take on the global chains. The city is becoming a hotbed of coffee craftsmanship known as the “third wave”, where the emphasis is on bringing out the pure taste of the beans, and producing high-quality brews with precision and expertise (the second wave being the proliferation of espresso-based beverages, Starbucks-style).

“London’s coffee scene has become the technological frontier for the world,” says Michael Cleland, a coffee expert I met at this year’s London Coffee Festival (londoncoffeefestival.com). “However, this is combined with a population that has not been exposed to different standards of the beverage.”

Londoners may never shun “fast food” coffee entirely, and are late to experience the third wave, which has been around in other parts of the world, such as Australasia, for much longer. But punters are starting to recognise the burgeoning speciality movement on their doorstep.

Magda and Edwin Harrison, owners of Artisan Coffee, have witnessed a change

since they opened their Putney store in 2011 (they have since opened a second store in Stamford Brook). “Back then, 50 per cent of our customers were from Australia or New Zealand,” Edwin says. “They would add 15 minutes to their commute to come here, whereas the English would only go somewhere en route. But, very slowly, we’re noticing that Brits are spending extra time to get a better coffee.”

As the number of independent coffee shops in the capital grows, their unique selling points are becoming increasingly avant-garde, but the focus remains firmly on quality. There’s Protein by Dunne Frankowski in Shoreditch, which is menu-less to encourage discourse between barista and customer. And at Prufrock Coffee in Farringdon, you can expect to wait ten minutes for your caffeine fix to arrive after it has bubbled through a Japanese syphon filter system, a maze of glass tubes and flasks.

It seems there is a trend for a more science-based approach to brewing. “When you start talking about coffee it gets more and more geeky,” Edwin says. He cites Artisan Putney’s “reverse

osmosis machine”, which reduces the hardness of tap water so that the pure taste of the beans is unearthed. With a third wave cup of coffee, every step of its production – harvesting, rinsing, roasting, cupping, grinding and brewing – has been carefully considered.

The V60 method, whereby a ceramic dripper is used to filter coffee through a paper cone straight into the cup, is increasingly popular (visit makedecentcoffee.com). The technique lends itself to another trend in gourmet café culture, which is “single origin” coffee – an alternative to the espresso-based second wave.

“Single origin is what it implies – the coffee comes from one location,” Magda explains. “Almost all espressos are blends because as the extraction time of espresso is so quick – about 25 seconds – you need to use a number of different origins to get a rounded flavour.”

“With single origins, the way of brewing them with a V60 takes about 2.5 minutes – the longer extraction time allows you to obtain a lot more flavour from the bean and, therefore, you can get away with having just one type of coffee. It has a much more delicate taste.” Forget caramel frappuccinos, it’s time to order something much more refined. ■

AN EDUCATION IN GOOD TASTE



ONE SATURDAY MORNING, I headed to the basement of an art gallery in Hoxton for a “Coffee Education” led by a duo of young hipster experts – Rob Dunne and Victor Frankowski, founders of creative coffee consultancy Dunne Frankowski.

Having skipped my usual caffeine hit, I was keen to get started, but before we drank anything, Rob and Victor began by teaching me about the biology of taste, and the value of being mindful of flavour.

After being told that aroma accounts for 70 per cent of what we experience on our tongues, we put this to the test by holding our noses as we chewed pieces of fruit, chocolate and nuts – it’s surprising how little you can actually taste when your

sense of smell is removed. It also felt strange to devote this much time to savouring and contemplating flavour, something Dunne and Frankowski believe people don’t consider often enough.

Next we discussed the biological need for detecting bitter (to alert us to poisons), and conducted tests to get to know our own palates better. Only after these, and a constant supply of coffee trivia from Rob and Victor, was I allowed to slurp my way around the circuit of lightly roasted coffees produced by independent manufacturers from around the world.

As we went, we tried to deconstruct the flavours – each cup is slightly different



every time you sip it. By the end of the session, I feared my morning cup of Nescafé wasn’t going to cut it anymore.

■ **Sessions last two hours and cost £40. The next ones take place on October 5 and 19 and November 16 and 30. Protein by Dunne Frankowski, 18 Hewett Street; dunnefrankowski.com**

SPECIALITY PLACES TO TRY

Artisan Putney 203 Upper Richmond Road, Putney; artisancoffee.co.uk/putney

Climpson and Sons 67 Broadway Market, Hackney; climpsonandsons.com

Federation Coffee Unit 77-78 Brixton Village Market; federationcoffee.com

Notes 36 Wellington Street, Covent Garden; notes-uk.co.uk

Prufrock Coffee 23-25 Leather Lane, Farringdon; prufrockcoffee.com

Workshop Coffee Co 27 Clerkenwell Road, Clerkenwell; workshopcoffee.com