

# Coffee Culture

*Coffee service evolves to meet changing customer tastes.*

BY DEBORAH GROSSMAN

**S**o many options exist, it makes a restaurateur's head spin. Are we talking about wine? China designs?

Microgreens? No, we're talking about coffee. Single origin, organic, fair trade, macchiato—coffee just isn't what it used to be.

"These days, people pay good money at Starbucks and Peet's for coffee, and know what good coffee is. The chains have set the bar very high; this is good for the whole hospitality industry," says Richard Coraine, chief operating officer of the Union Square Hospitality Group (USHG) in New York.

From the McDonald's launch of "premium" coffees to coffee menus appearing at Ritz-Carlton restaurants, it's clear coffee is getting a makeover. As savvy consumers impact beverage sales, coffee service is no longer an afterthought. A well-conceived coffee program with well-trained staff translates into a point of difference for dining establishments.

## Coffee habits in flux

Coffee is not new to the table, but consumption of coffee has evolved into commodity status and the classic ending note at dinner.

Yet, as Nick Peyton, co-owner of *Cyrus* restaurant in Healdsburg, Calif., notes, coffee-drinking habits have radically changed in the last 10 years. "Before, nearly everyone had coffee after dinner, with many refills. Now about 25% of diners order coffee, but an equal number order dessert wine, tea or nothing," he says.



QUENTIN BACON

**Terrace 5 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York serves biscotti with coffee, while MOMA's Cafe 2 invites customers to sample a selection of treats with their beverage of choice.**

As for coffee, he adds, the expectations are higher. The movement away from robusta beans to dark roasts from arabica beans is in full swing. "Ever since Yuban introduced 'Juan' from Central America, Americans have become more savvy about coffee origins, whether Indonesia, Africa or Central America."

Just as people expect bolder flavors in their food, says Peter Rudolph, executive chef at *Campton Place* in San Francisco, the same applies to coffee. "A few years ago people were content with watery drip coffee. Now they want a richer flavor profile, like the big, bold roast we get from *Fonté* in Seattle. We always look for body, balance and finish in coffee."



