

Holland coffee shop owner teaches steamy trade at Midwest Barista School

by Myron Kukla | The Grand Rapids Press
Saturday October 11, 2008, 3:09 AM



Press Photos/Mark Copier

Barista trainers Jonathan White, left, and Alex Chojolan, second from left, explain how to froth milk during a Midwest Barista School session. The weeklong school is offered by JP's Coffee and

HOLLAND -- Travis Yaklin figures he has more to learn before he opens a coffee shop.

The 24-year-old plans to open Guido's Coffee Lounge in Owosso later this year, and so he took a class with the Midwest Barista School in Holland this month. "I dumped a lot of the espressos I made the first day," Yaklin said. "It's a real knack to get the right aroma and taste to the espresso to serve it to customers. You just don't turn on the machine and call it espresso."

No, one doesn't.

To help coffee-shop owners, Jack Groot started the Midwest Barista School in January 2007 to share his 15 years' experience in the business. The owner of JP's Coffee & Espresso Bar at 57 W. Eighth St. charges \$1,375 for a week of intensive training on how to open a cafe and brew just the right cup of joe.

"I decided it would be more cost effective for the clients and less road time for me if I opened a barista school at JPs and ran the school from here," said Groot, who uses a second espresso bar in his cafe for the on-the-job training.

Yaklin was among seven students learning the fine art of making espresso, lattes and mochas, and how to operate a successful business. They are entering a crowded marketplace.

Specialty-coffee sales were \$12 billion in 2006. That year, there were 23,900 coffee shops and cafes in the U.S. with about 10 percent new spots opening annually, according to the Specialty Coffee Association, a national trade group.

"I'm going to open a coffee shop in Harrison, Ark., and I figured I better know how to do things right, so I went online to find Barista training. Now, I'm here learning everything I can," said Chris Dorman, 43.

Along with hands-on training, students also learn the four Ms of the coffee trade: "Macinazione" or correct grind; "Miscela" or choice of coffee blends; "Macchina," the espresso machine, and "Mano," the skill of the barista.

"All of those things have to come together for the perfect pour," Groot said. "It's a skill and an art, and a lot of coffee shops don't have the skill or the art so they produce swill," he said.

The five-day session includes the history of coffee and then shifts into the grinding and making of espressos.

"I sampled so many espressos and lattes on our second day of class that I was literally bouncing off the walls that night," said Andrea Johnson, who plans to start a barista training program for the Rockford, Ill., Rescue Mission's Restoration Cafe.

The participants were making Mega Mochas, cappuccinos and lattes, and getting rated by customers at JPs.

"When they leave the class, they have the knowledge to do things right. The speed, an essential ingredient in the espresso business, takes practice and more practice," Groot said.

A good barista also needs to learn how to create espresso art, creating with rosettes, swirls and other designs with cream. They also need to know how to select good coffee beans which is why students make a field trip to the Nunica roastery of Magnum Coffee Co.

"The skill of the barista is really important," Groot said.

Yaklin and other budding baristas wouldn't disagree.

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