

68. BY CHRISTINE COTTRELL



DESTINATION
VANCOUVER

VANCOUVER: WHERE SPECIALTY COFFEE IS BLOOMING
CHRISTINE COTTRELL'S CAFÉ TRAILS CONTINUE ...



ur first trip to Canada took us to beautiful Vancouver. On the first morning we were directed to Greenhorn Espresso Bar in a leafy neighbourhood with gardens just starting to burst into spring. There were tulips and daffodils everywhere, along with other pretty things a person from the subtropics doesn't recognise.

By 9am Greenhorn was buzzing, and the barista took time to recognise our accent. He then told us that they have an Australian working with them and went on to explain how they make their macchiatos: lots of milk and a "rosetta" on top. With our policy of "When in Rome, do as the Romans do", I was not about to argue.

We found a niche to enjoy our milky macchiatos ("piccolos" by our standards), while watching Canadian-style rush hour unfold, pretty much how it happens anywhere else in a specialty café, with a few lingerers with laptops, the odd addict rushing in for

a caffeine fix, small groups slowly savouring warm beverages on the crisp spring morning. I'd be happy to have Greenhorn in my neighbourhood if I lived in Vancouver.

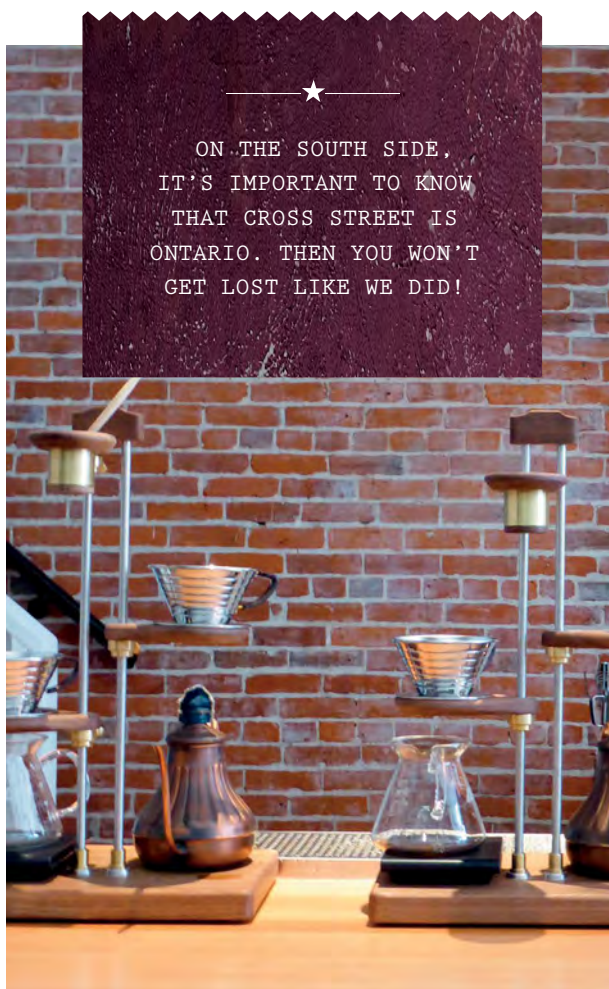
In need of a walk after our long flight over the Pacific, we headed for Stanley Park, a large area of park and tracks where, during weekends or late evenings, you'll be dodging walkers, joggers and cyclists. At our estimation (photography stops included) a walk of the perimeter would have taken us over 3 hours. Opting for a shorter route, we wandered through the centre, where we stumbled upon an area of enormous hardwood trees with squirrels darting up and down. They are worth looking for! Our destination was The Teahouse, now an iconic restaurant with a fabulous view and seriously good food.

For our afternoon coffee we visited Milano Espresso Bar at 849 Denman Street. There are also other Milanos in town, one at 36 Powell Street and their roastery at 156 West 8th Avenue. With a traditional Italian focus (their

motto is "West coast heart, Italian soul") they succeeded in satisfying two fussy Australians with their espressos. Complete the walk down Denman Street, and you will end up at English Bay. On a sunny day, the ambience is spectacular, particularly on sunset.

On day two we headed for Gastown, where Water Street is the loveliest in this historic precinct. In the centre is the intriguing steam-operated clock that tourists flock to see. As well as the beautifully restored buildings, a little further along are some interesting modern ones by the waterfront, including a Convention Centre/Luxury Hotel/Cruise Terminal that juts into the bay looking like a multi-storeyed cruise liner – with sails on top.

Timbertrain Coffee Roasters, at 311 West Cordova Street, is very up to the minute and run by three lads who are focused on giving every customer the best possible coffee experience. Despite being open only a few months at the time, it was clear they were well on the way to achieving success,



with exceptional brewed coffees prepared in a number of different ways and meticulous attention to detail and customer care.

Revolver, at 325 Cambie Street, is a very popular, upbeat place that has a small retail store attached in the premises next door. Again we found lots of interesting brewed options on offer and baristas who know what they're doing.

If you're interested in old wares or just on for a completely different experience, you'll find Luke's General Store at 126 East Pender Street a treat. It's an antiques/bric a brac store with a pop-up café (serving Stumptown coffee) in the middle and a barbershop. Seems you just find an old bench or chair to sit on and clear yourself some space at a table if you want to put your cup down. The staff will chat to you about coffee, furniture or antiques. All in all, an interesting espresso experience.

Day three started in Yaletown – at Coo Coo Coffee. Sitting on the front porch with a view of the flowering fruit trees, we enjoyed two Canadian-style macchiatos. Yaletown is one of those reinvented neighbourhoods full of trendy stores and eateries – and a good area to go back to in the evenings for dinner.

While most cafés in central Vancouver can

be reached on foot, you can get around the rest by tram, bus or ferry. The city map is easy to navigate, once you know the dividing street where east ends and west begins. As in the USA, Canadian streets are conveniently named according to numbers and divided according to whether they are east or west of a certain cross street. On the south side, it's important to know that cross street is Ontario. Then you won't get lost like we did!

We went to the south via Granville Island, where you'll find a good produce market. Go on a wet weekend day, as we found out, and you'll be sharing with lots of locals and tourists. Best choose a weekday instead and a sunny one, if you can. The best coffee is a little further over, however, in Kitsilano in the west or quite a distance away on Main Street and Commercial Drive in the east.

49th Parallel Roasters, instantly recognisable by their distinctive aqua-coloured cups, has two cafés – at 2198 West 4th Avenue in Kitsilano in the west and 2902 Main Street in the east. Both are largish, fast-paced places with lots of customers and plenty of beverage and food options. We settled for pourovers, but resisted the doughnuts. 49th Parallel has an arrangement with Lucky's Donuts and serves

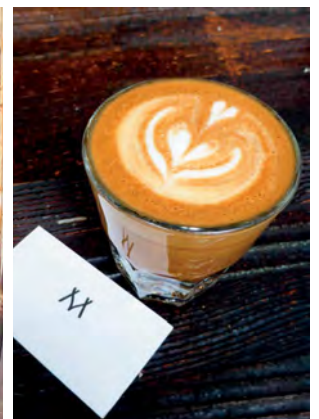
them in all their cafés.

Elysian at 1778 West 5th Avenue is quite a different experience. It's a small sophisticated space where hardly a sound is heard – except for the hum of your perfectly foamed milk in progress. There we enjoyed one of our best Vancouver espresso experiences.

Two others stood out in the area: Innocent Coffee at 1340 West 4th Avenue is a small café with art gallery space upstairs; and Arbutus Cafe is a popular café in a residential neighbourhood on the corner of 2200 Arbutus Street (cnr. of West 6th Avenue).

Matchstick Coffee Roasters specialises in single origins, is quite a bus ride away in the east at 639 East 15th Street, but well worth the effort. With the roaster out the back, the aroma of freshly roasting coffee greeted us at the door. The friendly staff suggested we also visit their city location at 213 East Georgia Street. Again, it was a large ambient space, but this time we were greeted by the smell of freshly-baked croissants, as there's a bakery on the premises. If you haven't heard of twice-cooked almond croissants in all of France, you'll hear about them in Canada. I'm not sure why or how they are twice cooked (I should have asked) but they are advertised like that everywhere. →

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→ A lady on the bus had told us to go to Commercial Drive, which made day four a bit like a wander down Melbourne's Lygon Street decades ago – when the cafés of old had passed their prime, some had closed down and some new specialty ones were starting to spring up among them. We found three of the latter kind along Commercial Drive: Bump N Grind Café at 916, Prado Café at 1938 and Turks Coffee Bar at 1276.

The most interesting experience for the day was at 1321 Commercial Drive – at Abruzzo Cappuccino Bar, an older café packed full

of Italian men watching soccer. Tables were configured in rows facing the TV and the only female I could see was serving lunch. Clearly cappuccino was not the focus at midday; it was all about the pizza and the game. I poked my head in the door to be greeted with welcoming hand gestures, “Ciao, Bella ...” followed by what I think was “they make pizza; the best in Vancouver here”. We never got to taste the cappuccino nor watch much of the soccer, but the pizza was good.

Although small in number, the specialty coffee places we visited in this beautiful city were all

exceptional and had something unique to offer. We left armed with valuable advice: if you want a piccolo latte in Canada, order a macchiato! If you want a macchiato, you will have to tell the barista how you'd like it!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Christine Cottrell is a widely travelled coffee enthusiast with a passion for writing and photography. She's the author of the *Barista Bible* (now in its 2nd international edition) and the *Perfect Espresso Training System* – a series of coffee books and training materials that are now selling globally. www.perfectespresso.com.au