



BARISTA CONNECT 2018 MELBOURNE



COFFEE EDUCATION
WITH CHRISTINE COTTRELL

On the Monday and Tuesday prior to MICE, over 30 women participated in Barista Connect, a conference for women on ‘all things coffee’. It’s an international series, held already in Aarhus (Denmark), Vienna and London. New York is the next. These events are organised by women, for women and the speakers are women. They’re the initiative of Sonja Zweidick, Austrian barista champion in 2014 and 2015. Sonja now hails from Denmark (La Cabra Coffee, Aarhus) where she was also the Danish national champion in 2017. The Melbourne event was run in collaboration with Sonja’s coffee chums: Mikaela Gervard (The Coffee Collective, Copenhagen), who was the Finnish Brewers Cup Champion in 2015 and 2016 as well as runner up in the 2016 World Brewers Cup Championship and Camilla Bargholz (8 Kilo, Aarhus) – along with an impressive line-up of local female talent.

Borne out of the fact that there are always way fewer women than men in the World Barista Championships and on any coffee speaking circuit or forum, you’d expect gender issues to feature strongly on the program. To the contrary, topics were varied across the supply chain – allowing women to display their knowledge and skills as presenters.

The day one program at Maillard Atelier kicked off

with Celina Lazarus (Maillard Atelier and First Crop) sharing her stories on sourcing green beans and Elika Rowell (Square One Coffee Roasters) sharing her model for quality control in a roastery café. After lunch, there were workshops led by more local experts: Monika Fekete (Coffee Science Lab), Amy Schubert (La Marzocco), Gordon Howell (Dalla Corte) as well as Chris Cheng and Lisa Chen (Acaia Precision Scales).

Just as the workshops began, Monika’s 3-month old son, Daniel spent a good half hour loudly articulating his needs – announcing how difficult it can be for a Mum to go about her work with a young baby. At the same time, it gave other women the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to multi-task as they took it in turns to take care of little Daniel while tuning into the workshops. With his message conveyed, Daniel settled in to play peacefully on a rug with his toys as the event went on. It’s like he was part of the program with his special role to play. Afterwards one of the other new Mums at the event commented how affirming it was for her, that having a baby does not mean the end of a woman’s career for a while!

Lucy Ward (Sensory Lab) then led a cupping of about a dozen fine Nordic Coffees that included the basics of cupping for those who’d not done so before. And to finish off, we were treated to a talk



on natural wines and a wine tasting before enjoying dinner together.

The night ended with the announcement of the ASCA Eleonora Genovese Awards – Sharon Jan (Seven Miles, Sydney) for the Australian Coffee Woman of the Year 2017 and Jade Jennings (Veneziano, Melbourne) as The Rising Star of 2017. The day two program at the La Marzocco Showroom featured Jets Anita Langlands (La Marzocco) speaking on marketing, Michelle Johnson (The Chocolate Barista and Barista Hustle) on social media and Lieke Kersten on coffee careers and the cultural differences that surround them. Jenni Bryant and Milla Vainikainen did a tandem presentation on Market Lane as a case study for best practice in dealing with staff. The final presenter was Charlotte Malaval (Toby's Estate) with her unpredictable and somewhat controversial take on women in coffee competitions. Again Lucy Ward led a coffee cupping, featuring aspects of production cupping and quality control – with some interesting practical activities that challenged both tastebuds and decision making. With trust built over the two days, the stage was set for lively discussion about anything and

everything the women felt inclined to raise. It was here that, inevitably, some of the sensitive issues related to gender inequity surfaced. The women also expressed how comfortable they felt to speak openly without interruption and judgement. At the end of the session, they felt as though they had been heard and understood.

With friendships formed and promises of putting into practice the lessons learned, we all went our different ways.

As a few of us pondered on the success of the event, we decided it was a lot about the 'gentleness' with which the program was run – accommodating latecomers, a crying baby and making sure everyone had a say and was included, for example. This promoted a lovely calmness that enabled the women to truly relax and enjoy learning from each other. Personally, it has challenged my strict protocol around 'starting on time and finishing on time'. I've certainly acquired some valuable food for thought when I next make a presentation or organise an event myself.

by Christine Cottrell Coffee Education Network (Perfect Espresso & Trending Cafes)