Drinking vs Tasting

I was looking at the Sweet Maria's You Tube channel - all the videos that Tom has posted - and noticed a video called "Drinking Coffee vs. Tasting Coffee". This is a point that we circle back to very often because it is so crucial to enjoying any sort of food or beverage, and for us, especially coffee.

Drinking coffee, you can often forget to move it around your mouth; the liquid kind of slips right over your tongue and you probably are only tasting it at the very tip and center of your tongue. Which is to say, you are not tasting it much at all, or not as much as you could be.

Tasting coffee means making a conscience effort to move the coffee around your mouth, to in effect chew it. Try this and you immediately notice how much more flavor you sense. Take a sip and make a chewing motion by moving your jaw, even move your tongue up to the roof of your mouth to spread the coffee around your tongue and the inside of your mouth. You might notice that you do a lot of "tasting" with the sides of your tongue and even the inside of your cheek.

The reason coffee cuppers (i.e. professional coffee tasters) slurp their coffee is to spray it into their mouth and back toward the retronasal cavity (the place where your nose and mouth sort of meet) so that they can sense aroma well. If you have a head cold, you may not be able to taste as well as usual since it is by circulating air into your nasal cavity (your olfactory bulb as it were) that you derive a lot of your sense of taste. And if you smoke, you are basically numbing your mouth and nose with tobacco, so you probably cannot taste as well as you should either.

Try a little experiment and taste a two different coffees next to each other and try to describe the flavors. I ought to confess something here: I am basically the opposite of Tom in that I usually just drink coffee, and don’t always taste it. I feel like I am too busy to focus on the flavor much when I drink coffee at the office, but when I do make the effort, I start mostly by focusing on physical things: where am I tasting the coffee? does the flavor fill my mouth or not? is there a lingering aftertaste? or not?

Diagrammatic view of a portion of the mucous membrane of the tongue (taste receptors or buds)

Next I try to come up with a word or two to distinguish one flavor from another, and think of the main flavor components: sweet, sour, bitter, salty and savory (umami). If I was trying to describe the flavor to someone else, what words would I use? If I wanted to compare this particular flavor to another food, what would it be? How are the two coffees similar or different?

The flavor words I would use (i.e. chocolate, peach, nutty, etc.) depend a lot on my experience with those flavors, whether it was positive or negative. There is a certain bitterness that comes from a darker roast that whenever I taste it, I immediately think "ashtray". I admit I am sensitive to it and a roast that is even a few pops into second crack (also all espressos) just taste ashy to me. For Tom, I think he is able to put that observation to the side, and taste other things, but for me, all I think is “ashtray”.

Some of the language that Tom uses in reviews can seem over the top - a bit outlandish - but it comes from trying to describe how one flavor is different from another. Comparing two similar coffees – like two Costa Rican or two Sumatran coffees – is obviously very different than comparing say a Costa Rican and a
Sumatran coffee. Both are fun experiments and are ways to start to train your senses a bit.

**Tongue Map** (scientifically disproven but interesting nonetheless):
1. bitter
2. sour
3. salty
4. sweet

**The Emailer is Back!**
If you are a long LONG time Sweet Maria’s customer – you may remember the emailer. I barely remember it; it has been I think 7 years (maybe longer) since we have done one. Mostly we stopped because I (Maria) could not handle the increased email traffic, nor could Tom and the packers really deal with the increased number of orders. Now, that might seem like an odd thing to admit to, that we basically stopped marketing because we could not deal with the extra business…but it is true!

These days we have more capacity than before; Derek and Erica in the office handle all the email and process the orders, and Josh and the warehouse crew (Jose, Keli, Noah, Dave, Brian, Dan, Carey and Mike) handle all the packing and shipping. So we thought it was high time to bring back the emailer as a way to keep customers up to date what we are doing here at Sweet Maria’s. The blog does that – but some folks like to get stuff in their in-box.

We plan to use the emailer to draw attention to coffees or products that we think ought to get a second look, and point out some article or photo essay in the **Coffee Library** that might be interesting. It is probably not a surprise to our customers, but even we find things on the site that we forgot or never knew were there.

To subscribe, just log into your account on the shopping cart and you will see options for managing your subscriptions. For the folks who (like me) actually *do* type in URLs:
<https://www.sweetmarias.com/sweetmarias/newsletter/manage/>

**Sidebar Sidebar**
Changes, changes. You may have noticed all of the work we've done improving the shopping cart and the sidebar. We hope to progressively overhaul key parts of the website and make it easier for folks navigate and find things. I won’t promise that it will be less of a labyrinth, but we hope to leave a few more bread crumb trails so you can find your way in and out better.

There are a couple of miscellaneous items on the sidebar that seem to get lost in the shuffle and we get requests for them often. So until we can figure out new ways to classify things, I thought I would point those out here.

The "Roasting Equipment/Accessories" section is where you can add Hottop filters, Behmor parts, and roasting accessories like thermometers. Make sure to also check out the "Coffee Brewers/Pour-Over Brewers" section. This is where we keep the full line of drip-cones and the new Lid for the Clever Dripper.

I am working to make the FAQs that appear on the site more streamlined and less piece-meal, and working to overhaul the Coffee Library pages – including new pages for the Tiny Joy back issues, and a new way to manage and search Tom’s travelogues. Whew! No wonder I always feel so busy…. *Maria*

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