Hot, Lukewarm, Cool: The Taste Shift or, Contempt for French Roast…

I was recently enjoying a cup of Java Djampit Estate roasted to a light Vienna stage, definitely some carbony roast flavors there, but not just a cup of charcoal water. Sometimes I think I am just too “anti-French-roast,” that there is something pleasant about those bittersweet, tarry dark roast flavors (when the roasting is properly done), even though so many coffees start to taste the same at French Roast levels.

There’s an aspect of coffee enjoyment that I haven’t mentioned, or even paid attention to much. With great coffees, there is a transformation as the cup cools, and flavors that piqued your interest when hot, change, mutate, or disappear as it cools, with new flavors that might have escaped your awareness emerging. In short, I like cold coffee. I like warm coffee. I like the whole “cooling down” process!

When I cup coffee (as I write this I just finished my evaluation of 28 Colombian Cup of Excellence samples) I make many passes around the table at differing temperatures. When it is hot, you have to be careful not to burn yourself (especially if you use stainless steel spoons rather than silver ones), but you need to hit all the cups quickly when they are hot to gather initial perceptions. Then there may be as many as 8 – 10 spins of the cupping table before I start to eliminate certain coffees, separating out the exemplary ones for round 2. But I never, never presume to “know” a coffee after tasting it in the first 2 passes. Too often, an initially stunning cup “falls apart” as it cools, while something that seemed flat initially becomes layered and complex.

People drink coffee hot, so why judge it luke-warm or cool … or why not keep it warm in some way? Well, firstly, people really don’t drink coffee hot. They wait, they sip, they walk, they read the paper, they sip. Secondly, I don’t like to prolong the life of a fresh cup of coffee by any means. When it is fresh, it is fresh. When it is stored (even in a vacuum bottle – which I do use when I go out to the beach in the morning) it is not fresh, and you can taste the difference. Now, slightly-not-fresh cup of fantastic coffee from a vac bottle always tastes good looking out over the ocean! (In the same way backpackers know that Kraft Instant Mac and Cheese can only taste good out on the trail!)

Now, I started this trying to claim that I don’t give French Roast a fair chance. And I end this by bashing the dark roasts once again. I realized that day I was enjoying my fresh cup of Vienna roast Java Government Estate Djampit that, as the cup cooled, the flavor really just persisted at the same intensity, with the same flavor qualities. It was roasty, it was pungent, it was carbony. Fine. 10 minutes later it was roasty, it was pungent, it was carbony. It was alright, but, “C’mon, what more do you have to show for yourself”, I thought. 15 minutes later it was the same, and then I started hating it. Those same, stupid flavors loitering around my mouth, not offering anything new or interesting, not contributing at all: bum flavors! And here I am, back where I started, with that same degree of contempt for French Roast.

Storing Green Coffee

I thought it was high time to revisit a question that we get fairly often - on how to store green coffee and how long it ought to last. Green coffee can be expected to last about one year - based on a six month rotation. We put a lot of work into tracking coffees to be sure that we do not have old, past crop coffee lingering in the warehouse. This does make us different from some other green coffee sellers and may mean that we are out of a particular coffee when other folks have it. For example the Kona coffee crop from 04-05 was very small and we ran out earlier in the year than usual, back in May. The next shipping season does not start until November at the earliest. So can you find good Kona in late September? Maybe. But if that coffee is from the previous crop - it may already be near the end of its holding period. Someone will always be willing to sell you Kona coffee any day of the year, regardless of how long they have been holding it. But we would rather run out of a coffee waiting for the next crop than stock coffee that is getting old.

Does this means that you ought not to be hoarding coffee? Probably. Even if you really love a coffee and get 100 pounds of it, by the time you could drink all 100 pounds, the flavor would have changed. So just like we have a strategy for buying green coffee - homeroasters ought to as well.

It is best to drink coffees that are recent arrivals. That way you can sample the production of coffee as it comes in throughout the year. (Though for folks like me who do not like a particular origin - like Sumatran - there might be some parts of the tour that you might want to skip.) Bright and low grown coffees like Kona's will tend to store less well than denser beans and coffees that are earthier to begin with. The best way to store coffee long term (for more than a month) is to transfer it to a paper or cotton bag (something that will breathe) and keep in a cool dark place away from excessive moisture and insects. Very few insects will actually feed on the dry processed coffee, but they can live in the burlap or cotton if it gets moist.

Some folks say that vacuum packaging and storing in a cool dark place or the freezer does extend the life of the green coffee. Most prominent among these advocates is probably George Howell,
who has been in specialty coffee for a long time, and has experimented with deep freezing coffee (at -40 degrees F) to preserve the freshness of the coffee flavor. He has claimed great results and now deep freezes all his coffee for his restaurant/café Terroir.

There are other folks who think that vacuum packaging or freezing coffee is nuts. Tom did a test on some vacuum packed Costa Rica La Minita that yielded interesting results http://www.sweetmarias.com/CostaRicaLaMinitaCupping.html. Tom basically think it is best to stick with recent crop coffee - so that you do not have a need for long term storage. I realize that this requires quite a shift in how people regard coffee - less of a staple like flour or sugar - and more of a crop like peaches or a product like milk.

More Information is posted on this page - http://sweetmarias.com/greenstorage.html but I thought I would go over some of the basics here as well. -Maria

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**Sweet Maria's Green Coffee Offering List**

November 16, 2005 – check the web page for the latest list

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Central American</th>
<th>1 lb</th>
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<th>20 lb</th>
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<td>Costa Rica Dota Tarrazu -Coopevoda</td>
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**South American**

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**African- Arabian**

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**Holiday Time**

Like most retail businesses, we get a lot busier around the holidays - so place holiday orders early. The last day to place orders for Christmas is December 14th...for regular UPS ground delivery anywhere in the US, that is. After that use express shipping or head to the mall. As in the past - we will be closing a few days before the holiday on December 22nd, and stay closed until January 2nd, for our one big vacation of the year. -Maria

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**Sweet Maria’s Coffee**

1115 21st Street, Oakland CA 94607

web: www.sweetmarias.com

email: info@sweetmarias.com

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African-Arabian (continued)

<table>
<thead>
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