

## Market Spotlight: Lighter roasts enticing coffee lovers

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Coffee lovers, burned out from the dark roasts popularized by some gourmet specialty coffee chains, are increasingly turning to lighter-roasted beans for their daily pick-me-ups.

Coffee industry watchers say as coffee drinkers have matured, they are looking for more flavor and more originality a desire that has created new lighter-roasted options in the market.

"We're beginning to see a more educated palette," said Andrew Hetzel, a coffee taster and founder of consultant firm Cafemakers, adding that more coffee drinkers are saying "hey, coffee doesn't need to taste like the inside of my barbeque."

Even Starbucks Corp., the king of the fully roasted bean, has introduced a new somewhat-lighter and smoother roast called Pike's Place as part of its plan to energize its U.S. operations and get back to the business of making coffee.

"We were trying to come up with something that had a little softer acidity," said Anthony Carroll, the manager of coffee quality at Starbucks. "It is a lighter roast, but still within the brackets" of the company's fuller-roast profile.

The difference between a darker and lighter roast can be subtle, but there is typically a richer and, at times, more bitter taste to a darker roasted coffee. Lighter roasts are sharper and can be more acidic. They also typically have more caffeine.

The flavor of some beans, like the Sumatra variety, can be enhanced by a darker roast that brings out chocolate flavors. Other beans, like some varieties from East Africa, are more suited to a lighter roast, which would bring out more vibrant and fruity undertones.

The shift toward lighter-roasted coffee has led some in the industry to see a corresponding focus on the origin of the coffee bean, which gives each bean its distinct flavor.

"People have really embraced all of the unique qualities that are noticeable in a number of single-origin coffees around the world," Hetzel said. "There's definitely a developing recognition of what some of those origin profiles are."

Green Mountain Coffee Roasters Inc. has developed its own line of premium single-origin coffees to grab those drinkers interested in learning more about the roots of the coffee they drink.

The line includes an African coffee called Tanzanian Combe Reserve and a coffee from the volcanic region of San Marcos in Guatemala called Guatemalan Finca Dos Marias. Both are lighter-roasted coffees.

"I think you'll find that people who are enjoying the lighter-roasted coffees are drinking them because they enjoy the flavor of the coffees," said Lindsey Bolger, director of coffee sourcing and relationships at Green Mountain.

Alan Keiser, spokesman for industry trade group National Coffee Association of USA Inc.,

said consumers are taking advantage of all the new coffees both the lighter and darker roasted varieties on the market.

"What consumers are looking for is choice," he said.

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