

SHABEAN COFFEE

Seeleys Bay Entrepreneurs Bringing Coffee Locally to the Next Level

By Andi Christine Bednarzig

“The biggest mistake coffee brewers make is to buy ground coffee,” John Barker stated on this chilly January day. Mary Whitney, his wife, watched as Barker ground freshly-roasted coffee beans for a steaming cup of coffee in the kitchen of their Seeley’s Bay home.

“Ground coffee purchased in stores is guaranteed to be stale. Always buy freshly roasted, high-end beans.”

Barker poured boiling water from a kettle into a metallic “pour over” pot. He then tipped a careful stream over finely ground beans and watched as a rich amber-brown liquid dripped through a hemp filter. He explained how the slow process of pouring water releases a succession of aromas, with primary fruity fragrances giving way to more nutty and woody tones.

So why “SHaBean?”. Barker explained that the name was derived from the initials SHB, which stands for “Strictly Hard Bean”. These initials are used to identify high-end single source beans grown in the Americas.

As a retired minister, John Barker has lived in diverse areas of Canada. Mary Whitney however, has long ancestral roots in Seeley’s Bay. The small village is located on the southern portion of the historic Rideau Heritage Route, which connects numerous lakes by man-made canals. In the summer, Seeley’s Bay’s dock is a stopover for paddlers, sailors, cruisers, and fisherman. After the boating season, the lively little community prepares for winter activities. On February 1st through to the 3rd this year, the 25th annual Frost Fest saw residents skating on the bay, building snowmen, and riding the chili bus to a cookoff held at the local fire hall.

Just outside the village, on a quiet residential street, Whitney and Barker can be found slitting open burlap bags of green coffee beans to feed into a state-of-the-art roaster set up in their garage.

“Our beans are purchased from Canadian wholesalers/importers who sell quality green beans, some from direct trade, Fair

Trade Organic, and through the Rainforest Alliance,” Barker explained. The beans roasted at SHaBean come from four continents: North and South America, Africa and Asia.

Whitney and Barker have been roasting coffee for years, keeping careful records. The couple first experimented using a popcorn popper and then upgraded to a refurbished gas BBQ.

Three years ago, the couple decided to market their product under the label of SHaBean Coffee Roastery and purchased a fluid bed roaster. The green beans are now being roasted in a column of hot air.

Aside from distributing their speciality beans to local stores, the couple have plans to include a packet of coffee in a welcome package for Canadian and European visitors on boating vacations, provided by Le Boat North America.

Whitney and Barker are excited about their upcoming trip to Guatemala where they will visit one of their suppliers.

Barker explained how the most desirable Arabica beans are grown at high elevations in volcanic soil. Only these hardy and more intensely flavoured beans are roasted at SHaBean.

The designation of ‘specialty coffee’ is derived through the process of coffee tasting. It is a practice carried out by tasters, informally called “cuppers”. Like wine connoisseurs, a cupper will sniff, slurp, and taste the coffee to detect its finest nuances. They will gage the coffee for its body, sweetness or acidity, flavour, and aftertaste and give it a score. A speciality coffee is one that has a score of 80 on a scale of 100.

Whitney and Barker continue to perfect their speciality coffees and are now researching air tight packaging to extend the shelf life of their product.

Barker added a final word of advice. “Don’t store coffee in the fridge or freezer, as it absorbs the smells. Just buy 100% Arabica beans in small quantities.”

LH



Coffee Tree



Mary and John's state-of-the-art roaster

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