

Pub Food Coffee

Coffee on the rocks

Ian Boughton visits a deeply traditional Cornish pub that takes a modern approach to coffee

IT TOOK a while for the pub trade to wake up and smell the coffee, but now it has, the opportunities are growing to cash in on the coffee boom.

But there are still some myths surrounding the secret of serving great coffee that need exploding. These include the belief that an automatic coffee machine is faster than a traditional espresso machine, and the myth that to make coffee work pubs have to follow the low prices of JD Wetherspoon, which first promoted the 49p cappuccino in 2006.

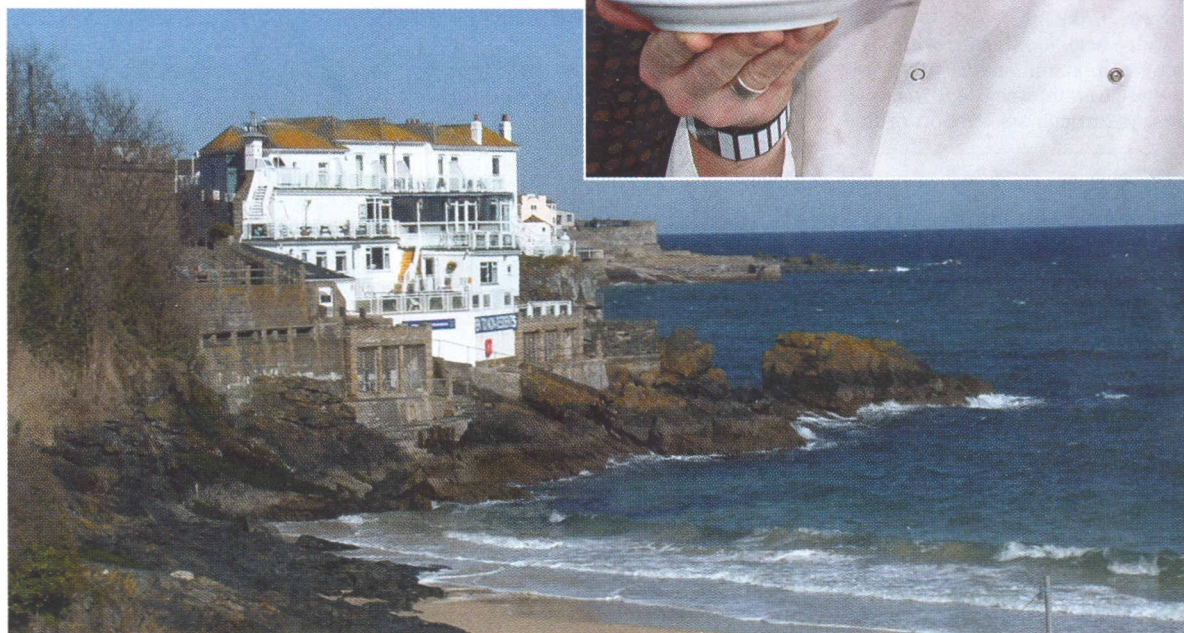
At the St Austell Brewery in Cornwall, training manager Shelley Tookey highlights the Pedn-Olva in St Ives as a typical example of a bar in which hot beverages have become vitally important.

The Pedn-Olva, a very traditional Cornish pub, sits on the water's edge – the name means 'lookout' – and legend says that 15 casks of smuggled brandy are still hidden somewhere within its walls.

"Coffee used to be a secondary item for a pub, just a 'supporting product'," says Shelley. "Now it's a core one. In the last five years, we've seen such growth in coffee that we realised we had to be serious about it."

Typical figures show that barstaff at the Pedn-Olva served 577 hot drinks in one week, almost double the number of glasses of wine sold; and, with a latte priced at £2.80, this is a serious performance. The pub's barista Dean Bungay tells of being at his espresso machine for five hours without a break at peak times in the summer, at one stage serving 65 cappuccinos and lattes in 45 minutes.

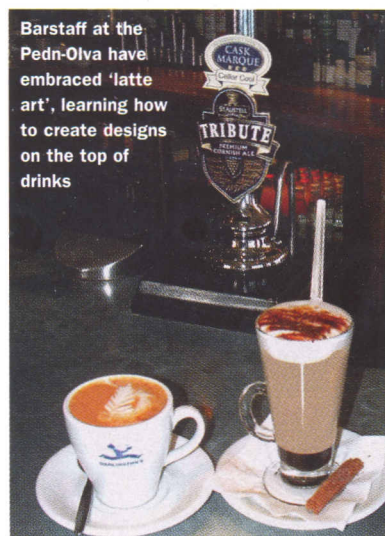
St Austell shares a growing modern belief that the way to reach such speeds is not to use fully automatic machines. In the coffee trade's definition, a 'bean-to-cup' takes whole roasted beans in at one end, milk in another, and produces a cappuccino with one press of a button – these machines are promoted as convenient and consistent in quality, but are widely regarded as expensive and a headache to maintain.



'Turn your espresso machine into a display' advises the Pedn-Olva's award-winning barista Jurgen Seltmann



By contrast, a 'traditional espresso machine' requires the 'barista' (an Italian term for someone who can work with espresso) to grind the beans, brew the espresso, and steam and froth the milk. It's a skill roughly equal to that of a cocktail barman.



Barstaff at the Pedn-Olva have embraced 'latte art', learning how to create designs on the top of drinks

St Austell chose La Spaziale traditional espresso machines, which are made in Bologna, and are noted for a particularly precise temperature control. The espresso beans are Fairtrade ones from Darlington's, a supplier which is not one of the glitzy names, but a serious enough player to have a few big-name clients among the cool coffee bars of Soho.

"We've proved that a traditional machine is, overall, quicker than an automatic machine," argues Shelley. "This is partly because most bean-to-cups make one drink at a time – on a traditional machine with two brewing heads, you can have four espressos brewing at once while you're preparing the milk."

"It's a misconception that espresso machines are slow – that's bad training."

"We have even taken on old pubs where the staff said they were happy to buy powdered coffee from the cash-and-carry, and in six weeks we have converted the whole staff into real espresso fans."

The training is necessary, but not

daunting. It is generally found that barstaff become quickly fascinated with skills such as 'latte art', the design on top of a drink which is achieved by a shaking action when pouring the milk.

"I wish I could quantify the training costs – but it's certainly not the most expensive in the world," says Shelley. "It's worth the time to get it right, and much of the cost is in milk to practise on... it's hardly the same expense as practising a lobster dish!"

Part of the key to high beverage sales is in visual promotion, says Pedn-Olva barista Jurgen Seltmann, who won St Austell's in-house barista championship.

"The amount of compliments we get on our coffee is more than the compliments we get for anything else," he says.

"We've now designed an area of the bar for the machine, and I see more and more pubs taking note of this – make a feature of the espresso machine. Turn it into a display, and coffee becomes an important part of your business." ■