The Book Lover’s Guide to Coffee
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What is coffee’s greatest gift to man?

Focus. Speed. A keen firing of the synapses. Coffee’s wonder is that it makes us more whole, more of who we are. “I’m not myself until I’ve had a cup of coffee,” we say. It’s joined us for every major moment in history since the fifteenth century, from Byzantine salons to today’s study of Byzantium, from the Cuban Missile Crisis to another sticky, humid, seaside Sunday in Havana. We flirt with others, even fall in for the occasional fling, but coffee is mankind’s drug of choice, a hopeless love affair that awakes with passion each morning, rising again each afternoon, and sometimes clear through into the evening, fueling ne’er-do-wells and do-gooder’s alike with a particular kind of hazy madness, the kind that says “yes” to the 5:00 p.m. espresso, or “please” to that fifth cup of midnight diner mud. You may not fall in love twice, but you can always have another cup.

And what about man’s greatest gift to coffee?

The written word, of course. Our gift is literature blotted on the tips of quills, clacked out to the rhythms of the typewriter era, and on through to today, where the digital flow of language offers instant reference, citation, and correction. With every cup our fingers flex more liberally and write with more urgency until at last—voilà—out falls prose like rain.

And so it’s only natural for us to begin the long and imprecise task of outlining just how special this drink is. To write about coffee in a way that does it justice. To get to the bottom, as authors and readers have for centuries, as to why exactly this stuff is so good, and where it came from, and why it matters. I hope you’ll enjoy the pages that follow, and that you do so as fate intended—with a fresh cup in hand, and a refill nearby.

JORDAN MICHELMAN, Co-Founder of Sprudge Media Network
The Grounds
“What on earth could be more luxurious than a sofa, a book, and a cup of coffee? Was ever anything so civil?” — Anthony Trollope, The Warden

The written word goes much farther back than the history of coffee, but ever since the two collided it has been a perfect match. What is it that makes the two so intertwined?

Today we have come to think of coffee, much like we think of books, as commonplace, an everyday drink for the majority of us. Yet coffee was once only reserved for the elite (also like books) and only after the passing of time did it trickle down to the masses.

Perhaps it’s no coincidence that it was during the Enlightenment, a time of revolutionary ideas in arts and science, that coffee as a cultural drink of choice came to fruition.

Coffeehouses first sprouted up in Europe in the mid-1600s, and they were soon seen as hubs of cultural activity. Literature, newspapers, revolutions; they were all born in coffeehouses. It was no surprise that such a boisterous showing of intellect would garner opposition from the church.

Pope Clement VIII, in power in the late 1500s and early 1600s, declared coffee “the bitter invention of Satan.” Let us not forget that it was at this same time that the Catholic Church published its first Index Librorum Prohibitorum, the index of forbidden books. If what the people read and drank fueled ideas contrary to the desires of the church, better to abstain.

For women, both coffee and books were off the table. The history of women and books is fraught with men wanting to exert their power. “In the history of women, there is probably no matter, apart from contraception, more important than literacy. With the advent of the Industrial Revolution, access to power required knowledge of the world,” writes Joan Acocella in The New Yorker. “This could not be gained without reading and writing, skills that were granted to men long before they were to women. Deprived of them, women were condemned to stay home with the livestock, or, if they were lucky, with the servants.”

There is a similar connection to be made with coffee. In Enlightenment Europe, women were often banned from coffeehouses entirely, kept away from these hubs of intellect and ideas, much like they were kept away from the public political sphere.

Today, we live in a more enlightened time, and yet, while coffee flows freely, many books are still banned for stimulating free, intellectual thought. We are also at a political crossroads, a time where our tendency to “bowl alone,” as Robert Putnam put it, has left us disconnected from our communities and the people around us. Disconnection easily fuels hate and, paired with a time when e-commerce sites rule what we read and buy, we are in yet a new period where independent coffeehouses and bookstores are of the utmost importance. We are in dire need...
of ideas, of community. Perhaps it is once again books and coffee that will fuel our own revolution.

With the rise of the world of specialty coffee, one where coffee making gets taken to a science, it’s easy to forget this social aspect: that coffee is, in many places around the world, an excuse to gather, an excuse to share ideas. It is the social lubricant that has fueled many a discussion, and will continue to do so as long as we drink it. But not if we drink it in solitude. Not if we opt for the Grande Hazelnut Macchiato to go, or the coffee made by the push of a button that we take back to our desk and drink in front of a computer screen. We need coffee to help us gather, we need not a place to sit on our MacBook and message on Facebook, but a place where we meet and discuss with strangers. We need revolution. We need those coffeehouses of yesteryear.

Reading books is of course a solitary activity, and yet if we pair that with a social occasion, we bring our new ideas gathered in the pages and we discuss them. Books are full of history, they are full of ideas, they are full of potential, but not if we sit with them alone. Books are a challenge to go out and connect with our community, to take what we have read and put it into practice. It’s what makes books and coffee such an ideal pair, a luxurious and civil activity.

So brew a cup of coffee and sit down with a book, one that challenges what you know about the world. And then share that book with someone else. Strike up a conversation. Connect with a stranger. Take time to be present, to disconnect from the digital world and be immersed in the real one.

We need our bookstores and our coffeehouses, because we need ideas and we need community. Let us gather together, drink the cup, and let the ideas flow.

ANNA BRONES is a freelance writer and film producer, and the author of The Culinary Cyclist and Fika: The Art of the Swedish Coffee Break. She is also the founder of the online food magazine Foodie Underground.
Before the 10th Century

Coffee is discovered in Ethiopia; *The Devil's Cup*: Stewart Lee Allen’s raucous travelogue takes us through the history and world of coffee.

1683

First coffee house, an institution which came to be known as a penny university, opens in Vienna; six years later Boston gets America’s first; *Celebrating the Third Place*: Ray Oldenburg, a sociologist explores the importance of “third places,” such as coffee shops, in civic life.

18th Century

Two Swedish twins sentenced to death are instead used for an experiment to test the health effects of coffee; “The Pleasures and Pains of Coffee,” Honoré de Balzac: a humorous essay exploring the highs and lows of the author’s caffeine addiction.

1882

Coffee Exchange of the City of New York opens as coffee develops into one of the most volatile commodities; *The Corner in Coffee*, Cyrus Townsend Brady: an early twentieth-century romance that turned to the coffee market for thrills.

1942

Rationing during World War II cuts coffee consumption in half; nonetheless the commodity still accounts for 10% of the nation’s imports; *Uncommon Grounds*, Mark Pendergrast: a superb general history of coffee from antiquity to modernity.

1971

Starbucks founded, later claims the name derives from Starbuck in *Moby-Dick*; *Onward*, Howard Schultz and Joanne Gordon: the CEO of Starbucks recounts how he helped revitalize the world’s most iconic coffee company in the mid-2000s.

1999

First of the Cup of Excellence competitions, the so-called “Oscars of coffee,” aimed at highlighting some of the world’s highest-quality beans; *The World Atlas of Coffee*, James Hoffmann, a lushly illustrated coffee table book on the places in which coffee is grown.

2000s

Beginning of the “third wave” of high-end coffee; *God in a Cup*, Michaele Weissman: a journey through the lush and exotic world of specialty coffee.
“The best stories are told over coffee,” observed a wise commentator in 1902, “as the aroma of the coffee opens the portals of [the] soul, and the story, long hidden, is winged for posterity.” While some of these are oral stories, many others have been written down. Coffee has inspired and helped to create a good deal of literature – in part, no doubt, prompted by the caffeinated zing, but there’s more to it than that. Something about this magical elixir and its complex chemistry stimulates the imagination.

At some point in the fifteenth century, someone in Ethiopia first roasted the seeds of a ripe red fruit that grew on a relatively short tree in the mountains. Coffea arabica still grows wild there, under the rain forest canopy, though its cultivation has now spread in a girdle around the globe, between the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn. That’s because of the impact of the bitter black brew produced by grinding those roasted beans and infusing them in hot water.

While the drink was initially used in Muslim religious ceremonies (to stay awake for midnight prayers), it quickly became a secular social drink in the Arab world, and almost as quickly people who drank coffee started writing. In 1511, when Khair-Beg, the young governor of Mecca, discovered that satirical verses about him were emanating from the coffeehouses, he closed them. The ban lasted only until the Cairo sultan, a habitual coffee drinker, heard about it and reversed the edict.

Coffee flooded into Europe in the second half of the seventeenth century. In addition to sobering up the population to some degree, the coffeehouses provided an egalitarian meeting ground in which eminent literati convened. In Paris, the Café Le Procope opened in 1689. Soon French actors, authors, dramatists, and musicians were meeting there for coffee and literary conversations. In the next century the café attracted notables such as Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot, and a visiting Benjamin Franklin.

Nineteenth-century French historian Jules Michelet described the advent of coffee as “the auspicious revolution of the times, the great event which created new customs, and even modified human temperament.” It certainly did that for Honoré de Balzac, who consumed finely pulverized roasted coffee on an empty stomach with virtually no water. The results were spectacular. “Everything becomes agitated. Ideas quick march into motion like battalions of a grand army to its legendary fighting ground, and the battle rages. Memories charge in, bright flags on high; the cavalry of
metaphor deploys with a magnificent gallop.” Finally, his creative juices flowing, Balzac could write. “Forms and shapes and characters rear up; the paper is spread with ink -- for the nightly labor begins and ends with torrents of this black water, as a battle opens and concludes with black powder.”

Likewise, Viennese coffeehouses fueled intellectual life. “The city of Vienna is filled with coffee houses,” wrote a visitor early in the 1700s, “where the novelists or those who busy themselves with newspapers delight to meet.” And in England, before tea took over, coffeehouses were called “penny universities” because for that price one could purchase a cup of coffee and sit for hours listening to extraordinary conversations. From such coffeehouses emerged The Tatler and The Spectator, among the first journalistic periodicals. These British coffeehouses were rowdy places. “There was a rabble going hither and thither,” one contemporary noted. “Some were scribbling, others were talking; some were drinking, some smoking, and some arguing; the whole place stank of tobacco like the cabin of a barge.”

Today, coffeehouses continue to fuel great conversations, poetry, and literature, although, fortunately, most of them no longer stink of tobacco. And, of course, most writers (and readers) don’t need to sip their beverage in a communal setting. They can ponder their next sentence over a cup of coffee in the solitude of their home study. Regardless, coffee and literature nurture and sustain one another.

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MARK PENDERGRAST is an independent scholar who brews a fantastic cup of coffee. He is the author of many books, including *For God, Country and Coca-Cola*, *Mirror Mirror*, and other books. He lives in Colchester, Vermont.
Coffee Stats

**50**
Number of coffee cups **HONORÉ DE BALZAC** was reputed to drink every day.

**51**
Age at which Balzac died, in 1850, of complications then attributed to coffee consumption.

**1996**
Year Balzac’s Coffee Roasters opened its first cafe.

**2010**
Year Balzac’s Coffee Roasters launched its Margaret Atwood-inspired blend.

**$100**
Cost of a pound of the Harrar Longberry beans that **RIMBAUD** sold after he moved from France to Ethiopia. He considered them “awful,” “horrible stuff.”

**50**
Number of coffee cups from which **SØREN KIERKEGAARD** would choose, before filling one with abundant amounts of sugar topped with coffee.

**80z**
Ideal size of **GEOFF DYER**’s cappuccino, a drink the author considers one of “thwarted hope” and “dreadful disappointment.”

**Assessment of the coffee consumption of **STIEG LARSSON**’s protagonist in the Millennium trilogy, who once had to drink “more coffee during the past twenty-four hours than at any time in his life”: pathological.

**Time of **HUNTER S. THOMPSON**’s first cup of coffee, according to E. Jean Carroll’s **Hunter: The Strange and Savage Life of Hunter S. Thompson**: 4:05 p.m.

...of his last cup: between 12:05 and 6:00 a.m.

**60**
Number of beans **Ludwig van Beethoven** thought made a perfect cup of coffee.

**ONE THOUSAND**
Assessment of the coffee consumption of **STIEG LARSSON**’s protagonist in the Millennium trilogy, who once had to drink “more coffee during the past twenty-four hours than at any time in his life”: pathological.

**Number of kisses the coffee-addicted daughter in **JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH**’s Coffee Cantata says her preferred brew is sweeter than.**
The Brew
HONORÉ DE BALZAC
(1799–1850)
Balzac worked in bursts of frenzied writing during which he followed a brutal schedule: He ate a light dinner at 6:00 p.m., then went immediately to bed. At 1:00 a.m. he rose and sat down at his writing table for a seven-hour stretch of work. At 8:00 a.m. he allowed himself a ninety-minute nap; then, from 9:30 to 4:00, he resumed work, drinking cup after cup of black coffee. According to one estimate, he drank as many as 50 cups a day.

SØREN KIERKEGAARD
(1813–1855)
The Danish philosopher and writer “had his own quite peculiar way of having coffee,” according to the biographer Joakim Garff. “Delightedly he seized hold of the bag containing the sugar and poured sugar into the coffee cup until it was piled up above the rim. Next came the incredibly strong, black coffee, which slowly dissolved the white pyramid.” Then he gulped the whole thing down in one go.

L. FRANK BAUM
(1856–1919)
Living in Hollywood in the 1910s, the author of The Wonderful Wizard of Oz – as well as an eventual thirteen Oz sequels – would get up at about 8:00 a.m. and eat a hearty breakfast, accompanied by four or five cups of strong coffee with cream and sugar. Afterward, he would change into his work clothes and spend the rest of the morning gardening. Lunch was at 1:00, and only after that did Baum turn to his writing – sitting outdoors in a garden chair, a cigar in his mouth, writing longhand on a clipboard.

MARCEL PROUST
(1871–1922)
Shortly after waking in the late afternoon – typically about 3:00 or 4:00 p.m., although sometimes not until as late as 6:00 – Proust would ring for his longtime housekeeper and confidant, Celeste, to serve his coffee. This was an elaborate ritual: Celeste would bring in a silver coffeepot holding two cups of strong black coffee; a lidded porcelain jug with a large quantity of boiled milk; and a croissant, always from the same bakery, served on its own saucer. Wordlessly, she would place these items on a bedside table and leave Proust alone to prepare his own café au lait. Celeste then waited in the kitchen in case Proust rang a second time, which signaled that he was ready to receive a second croissant (always kept at the ready) and a fresh jug of boiled milk to mix with the remaining coffee. This was sometimes Proust’s only sustenance for the entire day. “It isn’t an exaggeration to say that he ate virtually nothing,” Celeste recalled in a memoir of her life with the author. “I’ve never heard of anyone else living off two bowls of café au lait and...
two croissants a day. And sometimes only one croissant!”

**GERTRUDE STEIN**  
(1874–1946)

According to a 1934 New Yorker profile, Stein got up at about 10:00 a.m. and drank some coffee “against her will.” “She’s always been nervous about becoming nervous and she thought coffee would make her nervous, but her doctor prescribed it,” the New Yorker authors noted. Apparently Stein grew to appreciate coffee’s salutary effects. She wrote that, “Coffee is a lot more than just a drink; it’s something happening. Not as in hip, but like an event, a place to be, but not like a location, but like somewhere within yourself. It gives you time, but not actual hours or minutes, but a chance to be, like be yourself, and have a second cup.”

**THOMAS WOLFE**  
(1900–1938)

Wolfe typically began writing around midnight, “priming himself with awesome quantities of tea and coffee,” as one biographer noted. Since he could never find a chair or table that was totally comfortable for a man of his height (Wolfe was 6’6”), he usually wrote standing up, using the top of the refrigerator as his desk. He would keep at it until dawn, taking breaks to smoke a cigarette at the window or pace through the apartment. Then he would have a drink and sleep until around 11:00. In the late morning Wolfe would begin another stretch of work, sometimes aided by a typist who would arrive to find the previous night’s pages scattered all over the kitchen floor.

**DAVID LYNCH**  
(B. 1946)

Several of Lynch’s darkly surrealist films started with ideas that the filmmaker and screenwriter jotted down at the Los Angeles-area diner Bob’s Big Boy, where he liked to go in the afternoons for a chocolate shake and between four and seven cups of coffee with lots of sugar. “I would get a rush from all this sugar, and I would get so many ideas!” Lynch later recalled. “I would write them on these napkins. It was like I had a desk with paper. All I had to do was remember to bring my pen, but a waitress would give me one if I remembered to return it at the end of my stay.”

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**MASON CURREY**’s writing has appeared in *Slate, Metropolis, and Print*. He’s most recently the author of *Daily Rituals: How Artists Work*. He lives in Brooklyn.
## References to Coffee in Haruki Murakami Novels

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Photo Credit: Elena Seibert
David Castilla’s farm is perched in the foothills of Colombia’s Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. It’s high enough that the breeze is refreshing, not stifling like it is down on the Caribbean coast that’s visible in the distance. The surrounding woods are full of birdsong. Castilla, still energetic and wiry in his late sixties, farms a nice mix of avocados, mangos, plantains, and yucca, along with pigs, turkeys, and a cement pond full of tilapia. And coffee, of course, plenty of coffee. It’s Castilla’s primary cash crop.

I often think about Castilla when I drink my Colombian coffee. Because it is farmers like him – who pick their beans, bag them in burlap, and send them to market on the backs of mules, atop buses, or in beat-up pickups – who are on the other end of the massive industry that makes my daily ritual possible.

The worldwide coffee harvest now exceeds nineteen billion pounds annually. That is enough coffee to fill more than a million dump trucks – parked end-to-end they would reach from Seattle to Boston and back to Los Angeles. The industry has evolved dramatically over the past decade. These days, coffee roasters are sorting and blending beans with computerized specificity. Now the coffee that most of us drink daily is a remarkable blend of the low-tech and the high. That’s why Bob Stiller is another person who comes to mind when I think of coffee.

Stiller founded Green Mountain Coffee Roasters after tasting an exceptional cup of freshly roasted coffee in Vermont in the early 1980s. Then he revolutionized the modern coffee industry by packaging coffee in the single-serving pods called K-Cups, brewed in Keurig machines.

K-Cups first took root in office break rooms, replacing the once-ubiquitous sludgy coffee pots full of stale, weak, or burnt-smelling coffee. And once people saw the Keurig machines at work, they bought them for their kitchens. Now many Americans start their days by popping a K-Cup – each plastic thimble featuring a tiny paper filter filled with eleven grams of coffee, topped with nitrogen and sealed with foil. Green Mountain sold more than eight billion of the pods in 2013 alone. Along the way, Stiller became a billionaire by marrying the low-tech labors of coffee farmers like Castilla with the high-tech Keurig machines.

I also think of Betty Davis and Harris Lieberman, who gave me a tour of the Natick Soldier Research, Development and Engineering Center, just west of Boston. That is where the military...
researchers are learning how best to keep soldiers caffeinated. It is not as easy as it sounds, and the military has been experimenting with different forms of caffeine for more than a century.

At the military lab, Davis and Lieberman showed me some crazy stuff that’s very effective. There was caffeinated tube food, that comes in a container like a large tube of Crest, and is designed for U2 spy plane pilots, wearing pressurized suits, to eat through a special straw. They also showed me the caffeinated applesauce known as Zapplesauce, and caffeinated energy bars, and caffeinated chewing gum. It was all intriguing, but a more pedestrian product was also tucked away in the soldier’s rations: instant coffee.

That instant coffee is grown on farms like Castilla’s, roasted and processed here in the United States, packaged into rations, then flown off to the far corners of the globe, where soldiers, on midnight watch in Afghanistan, perhaps, can brew a fortifying cup.

Yes, coffee is still that same, warm, stimulating beverage, whether we drink it on a coffee farm in Colombia, from a K-Cup in a Manhattan office, or as a packet of instant brewed in a battered tin cup in a military outpost. However it is served, the magical elixir most Americans drink daily seems a lot more interesting once you get to know the people behind it.

MURRAY CARPENTER has reported caffeine-related stories for the New York Times, Wired, National Geographic, NPR, and PRI’s The World. He’s most recently the author of Caffeinated: How Our Daily Habit Helps, Hurts, and Hooks Us. He lives in Belfast, Maine.

LEARN MORE →

The Book Lover’s Guide to Coffee
BEGINNING OF THE “BOOK-STORE-CAFÉ” TREND:

**Early 1980s**

- Average American coffee consumption (including non-drinkers): 0.9 drinks per day
- Optimal number of cups of coffee for enhanced reading speed: 5
- Number of additional books you could buy if you gave up your coffee habit: 39
- Cost of the “Espresso Book Machine,” the in-store, on-demand book maker: $27,000
- Average American book consumption (including non-readers): 12 books per year
- Average cost of a regular cup of coffee in the United States: $8.50

Cost of the “Espresso Book Machine,” the in-store, on-demand book maker: $27,530

Average American coffee consumption (including non-drinkers): 0.9 drinks per day

Optimal number of cups of coffee for enhanced reading speed: 5

Number of additional books you could buy if you gave up your coffee habit: 39

Average American book consumption (including non-readers): 12 books per year

Average cost of a regular cup of coffee in the United States: $8.50

Coffee and Books, Side X Side
The First Sip
When I think of my father these days, I see him on the sofa with a mug by his side. Sometimes tea. Mostly coffee. He’s reading a book, or doing Sudoku. Sometimes he’s watching a movie.

This began after the brain aneurysm, when he didn’t have work anymore. He went for walks in the mornings to the library, wandered the mystery section, and read the paper. Afterwards, he ambled on home, scooped Nescafe into a mug, and made coffee.

It would often go cold, that coffee. It sat faithfully by his side during Jackie Chan movies, or Japanese television dramas. Maybe a Jack Reacher novel. My father lost weight, grew wrinkles, and became forgetful, but his smile and that cup of coffee remained unchanged.

When I lived in Nagasaki, my father was diagnosed with brain cancer. I came home not long after, and we sat together. We read books and watched movies. I didn't drink coffee then. But as I sipped from a glass of water, I stared at the smooth patches on his head from the radiotherapy and thought about human fragility. I watched his mug of coffee grow cold, and poured the remains into the sink.

I’ve made a home in Tokyo since then. Built a career. Met wonderful, passionate people to write stories about. Lived a different kind of life, and experienced another kind of world. But time still passed, back home. My father sat with his books and his coffee, the same as always, but he aged. Grew frail, slow, sleepy. He shuffled instead of walked. Put a walking stick in the lounge room. Got a walking frame. Had hand rails installed in the bathroom.

Three years away from home. Three years. But when I returned for Christmas, everything was as I remembered – just a thin film of dust on the shelves, DVDs, and books; reminders of the unstoppable passage of time.

dow while I vacuumed, wiped, cleaned, and tidied. By his side sat an empty mug.

“You want a cup of coffee, Dad?”

“Oh, alright.”

I weighed some beans and put them in the grinder. Turned the handle. Ground. On a whim, I took the grinder to the couch. Had my father smell it.

His eyes lit up in surprise.

“Wow,” he said, “this is the authentic stuff.”

Back in the kitchen, I got started. The process was no different from usual. A few minor adjustments. There’s no secret to the AeroPress. To coffee, really. You experiment until you have something you like, and that’s it. It takes time, but really, it’s that simple.

I took a small sip from the finished brew, and took it to the lounge room. I watched my father bring the mug to his nose. He sniffed. Smiled.

“Go on,” I said, “have a taste.” He brought the coffee to his lips. Sipped.

“Oh,” he said, looking at the mug for a moment. It was a moment that Lingered. Hung. Stretched.

And then he smiled.

“Fantastic,” he said. “Just wonderful.”

I smiled, too. And later, I cried.

Sometimes a cup of coffee is more than a cup of coffee. Sometimes it conveys a message, tells a story. Sometimes, it encapsulates three years of your life and what you’ve done with it. What
you’ve learned and experienced. The person you’ve become.

Coffee can make for a humble, feeble cup of apology. For being away, for missing time that is priceless and irreplaceable. Because time rolls on, and the world spins. The clock ticks.

And I realized that all I could do was make the most of the time we had now, and to do something meaningful with that time and the way we spent it. To share my happiness, in the hopes it might make him happy, too. I could, with each morning, and with each cup of coffee, put a smile on the face of the man I looked up to. The man I thought of, and think of, as my hero.

Specialty coffee isn’t always just the beans, I thought, as I washed the AeroPress. It can be the creation of a special experience, for a special person. It can be a moment in time that links the person who brews the coffee, to the person who drinks it. And there’s power there. Care. Empathy. Love.

That day, after washing the AeroPress and cleaning the Porlex, I returned to the lounge and found my father asleep, a Sudoku book slumped upon his lap. Beside him sat his mug, the same as always. I leaned down to pick it up, but stopped a moment. Stared.

For the first time I could remember, his mug was empty.

It felt like a small step. The smallest step.

And yet, I couldn’t have been happier.
Famous Independent Bookstore Coffee Shop Combos

1. Elliott Bay Book Company & Little Oddfellows Cafe
   Seattle, WA

2. Powell's Books & World Cup Coffee and Tea
   Portland, OR

3. City Lights Bookstore & (nearby) Caffe Trieste
   San Francisco, CA

4. Stories Books & Cafe
   Los Angeles, CA

5. Tattered Cover & Coffee Shop Cafe
   Denver, CO

6. Prairie Lights Books & Cafe
   Iowa City, IA

7. Trident Booksellers & Cafe
   Boston, MA

8. Housing Works Bookstore Cafe
   New York, NY

9. Kramerbooks & Afterwords Cafe
   Washington, D.C.
“Merde!” Panic physically gripped my heart and in one practiced move I swung my gaze from the wristwatch to the open door, pushed back from my desk and launched myself out of the office. I began to race down the hall, double-checking the watch as I ran. Mental calculations roiled out faster than IBM’s Watson could.

The three attached buildings in the heart of ancient Rome, built by Mussolini to manage his planned empire, were home to FAO, the Food and Agricultural Organization of the UN, and maintained five excellent coffee bars, which all closed their doors at exactly 11:00 a.m. to allow their staff a one-hour lunch, before reopening at noon.

But each bar had their particular barmen who closed the doors at slightly different times, to make sure that whoever made it in on time, could be summarily turfed out by 11:00 a.m. sharp.

Unless you were a do-nothing left over from the big 10:00 break, this last caffè wasn’t going to be something to linger over. No cappuccino, no Americano and definitely no caffè corretto. This last coffee was a thirty-second caffè, a ristretto or lungo macchiato at most. It was a shot, a hit, a fix. A hasty swallow to sustain you until lunch.

So many calculations to consider. What’s the time? Which building? Which bar? Which barmen? Elevators were out of the question. If the bar you decided on was on a top floor, stairs were taken three at a time. If your target was on the ground floor, you took the stairs like moguls on a black diamond run, never letting your heels touch their surface. And, like the cart ruts you find on ancient Roman paving stones, if you looked carefully, you would make out similar downhill furrows on the marble stairs.

If you didn’t make it to your destination on time and were shut out, the proximity of FAO to the Vatican inspired thoughts of acquiring a knout or a custom-tailored cilice, in the expectation that self-mortification would prevent you from ever repeating that same mistake again.

What makes that drive for coffee so desperate?

As the largest technical agency in the UN System, the merchandise of FAO was script, numbers, and symbols, all to advise the world’s governments on the need to establish sustainable food security for all. If you got the whole lot right, you occasionally stimulated action that had positive consequences for those developing countries willing to commit to change. If you delivered up a load of inane statistics and sanctimonious verbiage, you simply filled the world’s filing cabinets, contrib-
uting to the deforestation you were sworn to prevent. And the difference between telling a compelling story and filling filing cabinets often depended on that last shot of caffè.

Coffee, clear thinking, and a focused mind comprise a holy alliance. Why? Most attribute this to the psychoactive characteristics of caffeine and the countless other neuroprotective, antioxidant, and anti-inflammatory components found in coffee. We have long known that caffeine itself can inhibit the activity of adenosine, a neurotransmitter that makes us tired or drowsy. On top of curbing the effects of adenosine-induced fatigue, caffeine also enhances the release of other key alertness neurotransmitters, such as dopamine, acetylcholine, serotonin, and norepinephrine. Boosting these leads to improved cognition, learning, memory, and motivation.

But coffee’s influence on mental function transcends the biochemists’ playbook and goes beyond our casual understanding of alertness and sharpened sensory awareness. After all, caffeine tablets, theophylline in tea, and theobromine in chocolate also keep us wide awake and attentive, but they don’t give rise to that intellectual focus so vital to intuitive reading and creative writing.

I recall one early afternoon when I was particularly stressed, I had to get out of the building for a short break and a breath of fresh air. I wandered down Rome’s Viale Aventino to my favorite bar. There were no other customers around when I asked for my caffè. The barman hesitated a moment, took out a cappuccino-size cup and pulled an espresso for me. As he handed me the cup, I curiously asked if he’d run out of the small espresso cups. “Taste it, slowly,” he said. I brought the cup to my lips, took a sip and it seemed even bet-
ter than his usual brew. “It’s great!” I said, “How did you do it?” “It’s the cup,” he said with a knowing wink. “When you bring it up, your nose gets to smell the concentrated aroma much better than in a small espresso cup.”

I congratulated him once again and told him how great it was. He leaned over conspiratorially, held a finger to his lips and whispered, “Signor Satin, you’re the only foreigner that I tell this to!” With that, I walked out of the bar, free of all stress, possessed of a privileged confidence to better appreciate that amalgam of more than 1,000 volatile compounds that contributes to coffee’s miraculous flavor.

That roasted coffee bean aroma itself has been found to elicit changes in the brain’s messenger RNA and protein expression levels that result in stress reduction. Merely the unique blend of aroma volatiles can put your mind at ease. Combine that with coffee’s body, that pleasing mouthfeel as it passes across your tongue before swallowing, and you have all that’s necessary to help you relax. And then the caffeine steps in to sharpen the mind’s intellect – if you let it.

Having a coffee after a meal may wash down food and help you with digestion, but unless your mind is prepared for it, little else will occur. But, if you seek mental stimulus from coffee’s fusion of stress-reducing and mind-expanding components for inspired reading or writing, you must be a vital part of the event. So, inhale the fragrance, take a sip, close your eyes for a moment, and let the synergy work.

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Coffee in Literature Quotes

“Our culture runs on coffee and gasoline, the first often tasting like the second.”

Edward Abbey

“Coffee makes us severe, and grave, and philosophical.”

Jonathan Swift

“That’s something that annoys the hell out of me - I mean if somebody says the coffee’s all ready and it isn’t.”

J.D. Salinger

“The morning cup of coffee has an exhilaration about it which the cheering influence of the afternoon or evening cup of tea cannot be expected to reproduce.”

Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr.

“American coffee can be a pale solution served at a temperature of 100 degrees centigrade in plastic thermos cups, usually obligatory in railroad stations for purposes of genocide, whereas coffee made with an American percolator, such as you find in private houses or in humble luncheonettes, served with eggs and bacon, is delicious, fragrant, goes down like pure spring water, and afterwards causes severe palpitations, because one cup contains more caffeine than four espressos.”

Umberto Eco

“It is inhumane, in my opinion, to force people who have a genuine medical need for coffee to wait in line behind people who apparently view it as some kind of recreational activity. I bet this kind of thing does not happen to heroin addicts.”

Dave Barry
The Zing
TIPS & TRICKS ON TAKING PHOTOS OF COFFEE & BOOKS

WRITTEN BY NATASHA MINOSO
ILLUSTRATED BY DR. GOTHAM

PICK AN AESTHETICALLY PLEASING BOOK COVER

CHOOSE AN ANGLE TO WORK WITH

PREPARE TO BE SHAMELESS

FOCUS!

EDITING IS EASILY THE BEST PART OF TAKING PHOTOS
1. Prep
Clean equipment & boil water

2. Add
Add 4 tbsp of ground coffee to the carafe

3. Pour
Pour 16 ounces or 2 cups of almost boiling water & set timer for 5 minutes

4. Stir
After 1 minute stir grinds

5. Steep
Place plunger at top of water. Let steep 4 more minutes

6. Press
After 5 minutes total, slowly depress plunger fully

7. Enjoy!
If there is enough for a 2nd cup pour so grinds don’t keep brewing

Birch Coffee is a specialty coffee roaster with a Roast House and 7 coffee shops in NYC. We believe in People First, Coffee a Very Close Second. #birchlovesyou
1. Prep
Set Chemex filter inside brewer & thoroughly rinse with hot water.

2. Drain
After fully saturated pull back filter & drain rinse water over a sink.

3. Add
Set Chemex atop scale, add 4 tbsp of coffee to filter, tare scale (if you have one) to 0.

4. Pour
Start pouring 2 cups of boiling water in clockwise motion, fully saturating grounds bringing coffee to a bloom. Let sit for 1 minute.

5. Pour
Continue pouring water in a steady pulsing motion over the center of your Chemex in stages of 100g or 3 oz at a time.

6. Wait
Once scale reads approx 448g, or you’re out of water, allow to stop dripping then remove filter. Brew should take 4-5 minutes.

7. Swirl
Remove filter & gently swirl Chemex before pouring for best taste.

8. Enjoy!

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LEARN MORE
1. Add
Pour 4 oz of ground coffee into a glass or plastic vessel that’s at least 32 ounces or 1 quart in size.

2. Pour
Pour 20 oz of water into vessel and fully saturate all the coffee grinds.

3. Stir
Thoroughly mix the water and coffee to ensure all the grinds are fully saturated.

4. Wait
Cap the vessel and allow the coffee to brew for 24 hours at room temp.

5. Strain
Strain original vessel into a new clean pitcher using a colander or coffee filter. Keeping out the coffee grinds is crucial.

6. Dispose
Get rid of all the used coffee grinds. Strain cold brew again if necessary.

7. Dilute
Dilute concentrate to taste. We like 1.5 parts water to 1 part coffee.

8. Enjoy!
Pour over ice & enjoy! Recap jar & keep remaining cold brew refrigerated.