



Latte art—seen here on the microfoam of this Milstead & Co. cappuccino—is an example of how the art of making coffee has grown since 1971.

COFFEE CULTURE

The original Starbucks, founded in 1971 at Pike Place Market, aimed to develop an advanced and—at the time—unique way of drinking coffee, an idea that a new generation of Seattle-based coffee shops are also promoting in their own way.

BY TAYLOR CLAYTON

● In 1971, a vision was born as three former University of San Francisco students came together to open the first Starbucks coffee shop, located in Pike Place Market. Originally selling whole bean and ground coffee, Starbucks eventually grew under new ownership to sell brewed coffee drinks and lattes. This new way of making coffee developed into what is now known as the “second wave” of coffee shops, with the Starbucks conglomerate at the forefront of the new movement. Today, with roughly 24,000 retail stores in more than 70 countries, Starbucks has created an empire and with it placed Seattle on the map.

The rapid growth of the Starbucks franchise gave birth to coffee drinkers looking for quality over quantity. With this newfound desire, “third wave” coffee shops began to pop up around the dawn of the new millennium, especially here in Seattle. As a result, the Emerald City is now home to a plethora of coffee shops that provide their own way of brewing coffee, each with its authentic vibe, following similar ideals the original Starbucks coffee shop pioneered.

“Starbucks definitely made the market for lattes in the United States. The 12-ounce latte is the financial backbone of all independent third-wave cafes,” says Seattle Coffee Works founder and owner Sebastian Simsch. Simsch, along with his wife and business partner Pipo Bui, opened their first pop-up coffee shop in 2006 in downtown and originally was one of the only two coffee roasters in the area. Their goal was to sell more quality espresso—such as macchiatos—in a section of the city they felt was lacking quality coffee options (this shop was also close to the first Starbucks coffee shop location).

Their dream eventually blossomed into the Seattle Coffee Works we know today, with four locations in the city, all with names related to the Seattle neighborhood in which they reside: Seattle Coffee Works in downtown (relocating to 108 Pine Street in mid-October 2019), Ballard Coffee Works in Ballard, Capitol Coffee Works in Capitol Hill and Cascade Coffee Works in South Lake Union. Not only do these shops connect with the area, but they also provide a unique atmosphere and method of brewing.



“Amazing coffee, kind people, cozy spaces, that’s basically what our vibe is,” says Simsch. “We have our Slow Bar, and at the Slow Bar we offer various manual brew methods that change from time to time, so we always have five different brew methods available: three pour-over methods, the vacuum pot and the AeroPress.”

Simsch not only has a unique way of brewing coffee, but he also gathers his resources in unconventional ways.

“We’re one of two roasters in the country that are completely 100 percent also an importer. We import directly from Guatemala and Ethiopia. We book our own containers currently and, with help from other companies, are getting coffee from Honduras, Ecuador and Kenya.”

While a handful of coffee shops in Seattle aim to provide a bright space, this is, however, the birthplace of grunge, and some shops such as Anchorhead Coffee Co. want to provide the exact opposite of that.

“We like to do the opposite of what people do just to be different,” explains Anchorhead owner Mike Steiner. “The vibe is pretty relaxing but we went with really dark colors with our cafe.”

Being a former member of the music industry, Steiner lived a rock ‘n’ roll lifestyle and wanted a mellow place to drink coffee.

“My business partner and I worked in music, we did live audio, we mixed different instruments for rock bands that were playing live, and we were traveling all around the world, around the states a bunch of times, constantly on the road, and coffee was something that we always really enjoyed,” says Steiner.

A lot of third wave coffee shops tend to lean on bright colors to help customers wake up in the morning, whereas Anchorhead allows coffee drinkers to wake up on their own terms. The drink options at Anchorhead reflect their owners’ creative mindset as well, with a large variety of atypical caffeine and tea options, such as nitro mint cold brews and pistachio milk green tea matcha.

Milstead & Co. in Fremont does its best to cater to all kinds of coffee drinkers: those who want to sit back and sip a latte and those who need a quick boost on their way to work.

“Some folks come in looking to dig a little deeper on the coffee menu and find something new to them,” says owner

From left: Seattle Coffee Works’ own whole bean coffee; gathering coffee resources from the western highlands of Guatemala.



Andrew Milstead. “Others know just what they want and are simply hoping to get in, grab a tasty beverage, and get on to work, home, etc. My goal is to create an atmosphere that is welcoming to every person and kindly facilitate the type of experience each guest is hoping to have.”

“My first espresso-based beverage was at 14 at the first Starbucks to open in my smallish town,” says Milstead, who pointed out there are now over a dozen today in that very same town. “I distinctly remember feeling cool, grown up and aware of how the experience was as of yet, singular for me. I am unsure if it was actually Starbucks that coined the [third wave] phrase, but I do know that they introduced the idea to me and it immediately resonated.”

Milstead prefers the classic method of straight espresso or espresso with a little milk, in order to explore the true depths of a coffee’s flavor. It’s clear he and many other Seattle coffee shop owners want to do things their own way, whether it turns them into the next coffee franchise or just a local favorite.

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OWNER ANDREW MILSTEAD



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