

## The Roasters Guild's Role in Specialty Coffee Industry Leadership

By Spencer Turer | Photos courtesy of SCAA

The specialty coffee industry is at a crossroads.

While the associations that support and promote our industry are unifying, and the committees, councils and guilds are working diligently to determine their future paths, we are now reimagining the Roasters Guild with a new, multinational identity. Let's take a moment to pause at this intersection to consider the leadership that formed the Roasters Guild, subsequently changing the specialty coffee industry, and look toward our future.



The Roasters Guild has been instrumental in shaping the scope, structure and content of educational offerings throughout the industry.

In 2000, the Specialty Coffee Association of America (SCAA) was a different organization than it is today. One could liken the association's personality to that of a young professional, full of passion and enthusiasm and ready to take on difficult challenges and change the world. At that time, there were no guilds or councils, and the Specialty Coffee Association of Europe (SCAE) was less than two years old. The concept of a Roasters Guild had been around for a few years (a history of the guild's founding—written by Mike Ebert, a founding member—was published in the *SCAA Chronicle* in July 2014) but action was required to bring the idea to fruition.

True specialty coffee leadership was needed to create a tangible, strong and resilient Roasters Guild. The right conceptual and organizational structure was required to create more than a collection of folks interested in roasting coffee; our goal was to create a community specifically for professional coffee roasters. The early meetings were challenging, exciting and full of enthusiasm. The group that evolved from these meetings became the founders, and the first Roasters Guild Executive Council was never at a loss for ideas and opinions. We started with one goal: to create a guild that was relevant to coffee roasters and promoted coffee roasting as a profession. In short, to create a guild we would want to join.

● **CONCEPTUALIZATION:** The Roasters Guild was created as an independent organization within the SCAA. We were a guild of professional coffee roasters dedicated to the craft of coffee roasting. Self-direction and retaining the authority and responsibility for our operation was critical. The executive council would lead the Roasters Guild independently, without supervision from SCAA executives or board members. Being a separate entity was integral to the formation of the guild's personality.

● **INNOVATION:** Designed to meet the needs of working coffee roasters by providing intermediate- and advanced-level education opportunities, the Roasters Guild Retreat changed the concept of SCAA events. Events and educational classes were now being held independently of the annual SCAA Expo. (In addition, roasting classes held at Expo became the responsibility of the Roasters Guild.) The Roastmasters Challenge was created during one of our first meetings. This new type of event changed the educational paradigm, shifting away from simply attending and participating to collaborating and creating. Conducting our own meetings and hosting our own social events during the SCAA Expo helped differentiate the Roasters Guild from the rest of the SCAA, and allowed us to develop our own identity.

● **VISION:** By 2000, the SCAA training committee had become efficient at presenting seminars and lectures and issuing certificates of participation. The guild created the roaster certification program and, as a result, launched the specialty coffee industry in a new direction by creating a multilevel certification program with a comprehensive educational curriculum, covering all facets of the specialty coffee farm-to-cup process. Completion of each certification level required demonstrated mastery of the curriculum. The Roasters Guild's certification program predates the Barista Guild's certification program, the Coffee Quality Institute's Q grader license, and the SCAE's diploma program.

● **TRANSFORMATION:** Creating the body of knowledge to support the Roasters Guild certification curriculum drove the expansion of professional development committees and the identification of subject matter experts within the SCAA. The guild designed skill-building workshops and lectures to support the certification program. As a result, the SCAA expanded the scope of its training committee, which became the professional development committee and began developing subject matter experts to create new classes to meet



The Roasters Guild Retreat spearheaded the concept of collaboration and creation at specialty coffee industry events.

the needs of the roaster certification program and, by this time, the barista certification program as well. Intermediate and advanced classes were established to challenge working roasters. Meanwhile, new standards and protocols were published to ensure consistency of educational programs, and certified labs were created to meet the demand for classes as the number of students increased.

The early success of the Roasters Guild validated the ideas and actions of its founders. There are many examples of how the Roasters Guild influenced the creation of other organizations and guilds, and how our creative programs have been used to develop other hands-on, practical education programs throughout the specialty coffee industry. Today, there are multilevel pathway programs offered by the SCAA and diploma programs offered by the SCAE to develop specialty coffee professionals in many functional areas. To answer the increasing demand for local events, regional roaster groups have formed in the United States and around the world.

The question we face today is: How shall we use our past to develop our future?

Collectively, a Roasters Guild across Europe and the United States will be stronger and more dynamic than each guild is individually. Greater access for coffee roasters to collaborate and connect professionally will be possible.

Where will we find our next innovation for the future of the Roasters Guild? What will be possible for the future of coffee roasters? Can coffee roasters continue to inspire the specialty coffee industry toward a new direction?

We did it once. Now is the time to do it again.

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