

Notes from Roasters Camp 2018

By Stephen Houston

Photos courtesy of the Coffee Roasters Guild/Specialty Coffee Association



Roasters Camp brings roasters of all levels together to share knowledge, explore new machines and techniques, and have a good time.

In October 2018, I attended the Coffee Roasters Guild (CRG) Roasters Camp in Portugal. This was my second experience at Roasters Camp, as I was lucky to have been able to attend the inaugural camp in Estonia in 2016.

The experiences I had at that first camp helped me become a better roaster and coffee professional. At the time, I couldn't believe something like this even existed, and being in the same place as so many enthusiastic professional roasters made me want to become a bigger part of this community. It inspired me to learn more, be more open-minded, and jump right in to see how I could be part of the CRG.

In 2016, before we joined together with the Roasters Guild to become the CRG, we were still the Roasters Guild of Europe, so this concept of a load of roasters all hanging out together in Europe seemed like a mad idea, but it couldn't have been more successful. Everyone I spoke with who attended that first camp was, like me, amazed at the format, the workshops, the speakers and the location. It was something new and exciting—finally, an event dedicated to the art of roasting.

Unfortunately, because of work commitments, I was unable to attend the Roasters Camp in Poland in 2017. I promised myself I would make it to Portugal, not just for the great weather, but to immerse myself in this amazing European community of roasters. So in 2018, I signed up to volunteer. I was keen to see the camp from the other side: setting everything up, helping course instructors, assisting at roasting stations, setting up cuppings and classes, sharing my knowledge and, very importantly, making sure there was plenty of coffee for everyone to drink!

This year's program was very exciting, with a great lineup of hands-on roasting classes, including Specialty Coffee Association (SCA) roasting and sensory foundation courses, interesting workshops, a team challenge running throughout, free time on the roasters and plenty of importer cuppings. There was a great mix of skill levels, so everyone who attended could get something valuable from it, whether you had been roasting 20-plus years or you were just beginning your roasting journey. Camp is designed to make everyone feel welcome, and to be a great hub where we can all learn from each other.

Although I loved every part of it, for me one highlight was getting to help with an SCA roasting foundation class. I had attended classes before, but I had never been on the other side,



Attendees meeting their team members before beginning the team challenge.



Classes covered a wide range of topics. Pictured: Fabiana Carvalho (left, multisensory perception of flavor); Marie-Anne Rogers (middle, sensory skills); O.M. Miles (right, sample roasting).

sharing some of the things I have learned over the past few years, meeting new roasters, and getting to see a few tricks and tips that were new to me, too.

I also got to work with coffee educator Lauro Fioretti and Swedish barista championship coach Alexander Ruas in a class called "Adapting Your Roast to the Brewing Method." This is a topic I find very interesting, and it was amazing to get to learn how two such different coffee people approach roasting coffee for espresso—whether it's light, medium or dark roasts, with milk or without—and how they get the best coffee from each brewing method.

Another highlight was getting to work with the incredible Dr. Fabiana Carvalho in her workshop on multisensory perceptions in coffee. Dr. Carvalho has done some amazing research challenging how we perceive the flavors in coffee when it's presented with different colors, sounds and textures. I think this was a highlight for a lot of attendees. It was fun and informative, and we came away with a new perspective on how we taste. I'm sure this will be a talking point for a long time.

There were also many cuppings to set up, slurp and set up again, and a nice selection of importers based in Europe, Panama and the United States.

The team challenge is another element that makes me want to keep coming back to camp. This year, we were randomly split into 14 teams. The challenge

CONTINUED ON PAGE 76 ►

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Fourteen randomly selected teams competed in a challenge to develop a coffee blend that accentuated sweet and sour using any combination of the five coffees provided by Falcon coffees.



Roasting instruction on a Joper BPR-1.



Stephen Houston assisting students in a roasting foundations class.

was to come up with a coffee blend that accentuated sweet and sour. Each team could select from five coffees provided by Falcon coffees; then, over the next two days, we roasted, cupped and blended the coffees, and designed packaging and a poster for our team's final blend.

To me, this was one of the best parts of camp, working together with total strangers from different countries and backgrounds, creating, discussing, roasting and cupping. I learned so much and had a lot of fun. On my team, we had a diverse range of skills, from roasting champions, Brewers Cup champions, a farmer and more, which worked out so well we won the overall challenge!

It's an amazing experience to see so many like-minded people together in one place, working, sharing, creating and inspiring each other in the industry we all love so much. I can't recommend it highly enough to anyone in coffee, whether you are a roaster, a barista, a farmer or just a home enthusiast.

I spoke with a few of the U.S. roasters who made it to Roasters Camp and they told me that seeing coffee roasting from a European perspective really opened their eyes, and that they loved learning about new styles of roasting and coffee preparation. I hope to experience that myself by attending the CRG Retreat in the United States later this year.

One of the main reasons I wanted to serve on the membership committee for the CRG was to hear the feedback firsthand from event attendees, and to find out what roasters want us as a guild to do for them. This is how we all get better—being open and sharing our ideas and thoughts, inspiring each other, and making our industry stronger and more sustainable.



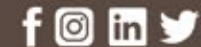
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