

ACCADEMIA DEL CAFFÈ ESPRESSO: PARADISE FOR COFFEE EDUCATION

IF WIZARDS GET HOGWARTS and chefs get culinary school, why don't baristas get coffee universities? Sure there are plenty of coffee businesses that offer their own versions of classes in coffee science, brewing, and agronomy, but nothing beats the empowering experience of stepping onto an actual campus to fulfill what many deem the "true" educational experience.

Well, famed espresso machine manufacturer La Marzocco thinks coffee should be just as magical as food (and magic itself), and has spent years working tirelessly to build one of the most picturesque coffee universities in existence. Welcome to Accademia del Caffè Espresso, a vision for elevated espresso education brought to life. This palace of a coffee academy sits tucked in the rolling Tuscan hills of Florence, Italy, in a renovated masterpiece on the same grounds as the original La Marzocco factory from 1959, a short drive from the company's primary factory in Scarperia. It was here that the initial groundwork for the company's now globally celebrated espresso machines was laid out. Initially slated for a spring 2020 launch, the Accademia only recently opened its doors to the public to coincide with the mammoth hospitality expo HOST in October.

"Accademia del Caffè Espresso is a container for research, information, and education that encompasses the journey from farm to cup," explains Guido Bernardinelli, CEO of La Marzocco. "Accademia tells a story beyond and above that of just the espresso machine."

"Beyond and above" is an understatement for the broad spectrum of offerings that the Accademia has for those who venture to Florence for this coffee mecca.

Visiting this legendary space was a peaceful contrast to the hectic week we had in Milan just 24 hours prior. As we drove up into the rolling Tuscan countryside beyond Florence, we felt we were entering a whole different world. Once inside the facility, we were again transported to another universe. Accademia is a serene space entrenched in natural light, with historical exhibits thoughtfully and meticulously curated by art historian Eleonora Angela Maria Ignazzi, who led us through each room and happily answered our many questions.

After pouring over old photos of La Marzocco legends like Piero Bambi and Kent Bakke, admiring the refurbished VW van that once transported machines from Italian town to town, and displays showing entire machines taken apart with every one of hundreds of pieces carefully laid out, Eleonora turned us over to Massimo Battaglia, an agronomist who oversees coffee research for the Accademia. He pulled aside a heavy dark curtain to reveal a completely different space, this one a dark cavern meant to call to mind the tranquility of an actual coffee farm.

Massimo passionately explained the various displays in the room—one for each producing region in the world, with each boasting videos of farmers discussing their farms. The displays even



PHOTOS BY SARAH ALLEN

Eleonora Angela Maria Ignazzi, who is the content curator for La Marzocco's Accademia del Caffè Espresso in Florence, Italy, explains the concept of the dramatic, functional art installation by internationally renowned Anglo-Swiss artist Charles Morgan. Created entirely with scrap from the La Marzocco factory, this kinetic sculpture is a structure in motion that depicts the goings on of the working factory in all its facets.

showcased soil samples from the respective farms.

Finally, we emerged into an open-air, two-story common space. Massimo led us to the room's showcase: an actual coffee greenhouse. As we stepped inside and felt the humidity of the climate-controlled garden, Massimo proudly shared that he had just harvested about 500 cherries for his "Tuscan coffee harvest" from the mature trees in the space.

Through the glass walls of the greenhouse we watched as La Marzocco staff and guests buzzed about the common space, which also includes a roasting room, a library, a full kitchen, a massive espresso bar, shared desk space, a gift shop, and even a ceramics studio where Accademia manager Nora Smahelova creates stunning cups and dishware used in the facility.

The academic offerings of Accademia del Caffè Espresso are intended for both industry professionals and coffee consumers to dig deep into the science, culture, and skills required to properly work with and study coffee—with plenty of course options that go beyond brewing an espresso on a La Marzocco machine. According to La Marzocco's product manager, Scott Guglielmino, the Acca-

demia—while owned and operated by La Marzocco—is meant to be a neutral ground for learning. This is not a marketing ploy to sell equipment (although the Home Section and Grand Bar are incredible areas for eye candy and impulse purchases), but a sincere attempt to enrich attendees with everything they need to know to understand coffee's true essence, and the influence it has had on the modern world.

"La Marzocco is an espresso machine manufacturer and Accademia del Caffè Espresso is a container for research, information, and education that encompasses the journey from farm to cup. Accademia tells a story beyond and above that of just the espresso machine," Scott says.

Adds Guido, "I hope Accademia will contribute to spreading culture, education, and fascination around espresso coffee across our industry ... while at the same time bringing awareness and action for a more virtuous cycle that can bring value to the producers."

For those who make the pilgrimage to Florence to dive into the true inner workings of coffee, the Accademia courses offer extensive yet accessible information for every kind of coffee lover, from professionals to home enthusiasts. Each class, lasting four hours, places small groups of six to 12 people together to understand concepts including sensory calibration, the value chain, coffee processing, and, of course, the art of mastering espresso extraction. Further, they've even partnered with the University of Florence to offer students a master's degree in coffee, inviting those who want to lounge even longer in the halls of Accademia del Caffè Espresso for an entire nine-month program.

For attendees seeking day-long education, Accademia provides several 60-minute courses ranging from latte art to picking coffee bags for home, and even arranging your own space to be a houseplant paradise. (Because all of the best coffee shops have the best plants, right?)

Beyond classes and workshops, Accademia del Caffè Espresso's laboratories encourage visitors to continue their experiences and practice what they've learned. Seven labs focus on green coffee, roasting, sensory, and extraction, with chances to analyze raw coffees, triangulate, and even customize espresso machines.

Although the curriculum is already massive, the initial offerings are just the beginning. After all, half the reason why coffee people love this industry is that it continues to progress and change. "We look forward to Accademia growing and evolving over time," says Guido. "We already are working on new courses and programs."

Accademia del Caffè Espresso is currently open to the public by reservation only, which you can book at accademiaespresso.com.

—Katrina Yentch



Top: The Accademia focuses on all aspects of coffee, beginning with the coffee plant itself. Research coffee leader for the Accademia, Massimo Battaglia, is an agronomist who oversees the origin installations in the museum as well as a living coffee garden where he can demonstrate different processing techniques, soil composition, and species and varieties of coffee.

Bottom: In its early days, La Marzocco built custom, stylish bars to house their boutique espresso machines. One such original bar was sourced and refurbished for the Accademia, and is a landing place for visitors who may enjoy Italian-style espresso at the standing bar.