



Strengthening the Coffee Community: Collaborative Roasting

From producer to roaster, collaborative roasting spaces are strengthening the supply chain by helping make coffee more accessible and economical, while also providing the opportunity to experiment with new technology and equipment. **By Anne-Marie Hardie**

The coffee industry is well known for its strong collaborative community, where individuals gather to discuss opportunities and challenges, share successes, and brainstorm solutions. The concept of collaborative roasting takes this a step further, with roasters joining together to share both space and equipment. The creation of these spaces has helped to make coffee more accessible, while also becoming incubators for advancements in the industry, providing a space to explore new technology and equipment as the costs are shared amongst multiple members.

The Canadian Roasting Society (Montréal, Canada) has adopted the collaborative roasting model to propel the coffee industry forward in its local region. Established in 2018, partners Andrew Kyres and Scott Rao wanted to advance the coffee industry in their local community, including providing space and equipment. Today, they have created a modern roasting facility with a 5,000 square foot warehouse and the ability to store 75,000 pounds of coffee.

The space is open for individuals or companies to use their resources, including a custom-built Probat roasting machine, weighing, filling and sealing machines, reverse osmosis filtration systems, storage space for green coffee, coffee tasting and brew laboratory and access to qualified personnel and on-site data analysis. There is a pre-established fee, avoiding the high start-up costs that individuals in the industry.

Breaking Down Barriers

The standard process for collaborative roasting involves a founder making a significant capital investment and then sharing their resources with others in the coffee community for a pre-set fee.

Leonardo Azeredo, founder of Co-Roasting®, based in France, was intrigued by the concept of this model but pondered if it could be done differently; specifically, if instead of renting a space and the equipment for roasters to use, there was equipment in his community that was currently not being maximised. In 2018, while Azeredo was completing his executive MBA, he began researching if this type of model would be possible. His research, which involved



interviewing over 100 roasters in France, revealed that more than 80 percent said that they used their equipment only two days a week.

The collaborative roasting model proposed by Co-Roasting was centered around maximising the existing resources by developing a digital platform that could pair individuals seeking a roaster with owners of roasters that were not used to their total capacity. “If they want to be a host, it’s not only a matter of having equipment that is not being used to its full capacity, but also about having a willingness to share knowledge to help develop the competence of someone looking to get into the field,” said Azeredo. Specifically, he is seeking members who are aligned with the Co-Roasting community’s core values of integrity, respect, sharing, and empathy and are willing to share their equipment and become part of an entrepreneurship incubator.

“I strongly believe that people need to have accountability for their decisions, and if someone is looking to quickly start their business, collaborative roasting is a good way to start,” said Azeredo. “We can do things differently and continue to innovate with a collective intelligence; our vision is to create a full value chain of collaboration.”

This includes extending the collaborative model beyond the individuals who use the equipment and the hosts of the equipment to other key players in the industry, including equipment suppliers, software manufacturers, and producers. “Our vision is to create this kind of ecosystem, to help accelerate the process of being able to provide and give access to good coffee to the consumer.” Currently, Co-Roasting® has close to 50 members, including users, hosts, producers, and equipment manufacturers, in France, Belgium and Brazil, and it plans to expand into other regions. >

Coffee drying at Los Pirineos farm in El Salvador. Right: Roasted beans

Image credit: Bram De Hoog; PJ's Coffee

Building Bridges

Could producer ownership be a new form of collaboration? On 22 February 2024, Paso Paso opened its doors, presenting the coffee community with a new version of collaboration involving producer investment. Bram De Hoog, the visionary of this concept, actively sought out producers from across the globe to develop a company centred around producers coming together to co-own a roastery and, in turn, empower producers to represent themselves in the European market.

“Each business has its complications, challenges, and the investments that it needs to succeed, but I could see some of our clients from the importer side opening up a coffee shop and expanding their roasting business from purchasing ten bags to 100 bags over the course of only a few years,” said De Hoog. “I just didn’t see the same potential for growth on the coffee producer side.” All participants, which currently includes five producers and De Hoog, are registered shareholders of the company based in Germany and are actively involved in making decisions and profit-sharing.

“I wanted to be very egalitarian and very straightforward – basically, if you invest money in the roastery, you will get shares in it, there’s no further complication to it,” said De Hoog. The roastery, which is based in Hannover, Germany, is currently being operated by De Hoog, while the producers, who reside in their respective countries, are involved in all company decisions, which includes committing to monthly meetings to discuss strategy and financing.

The producers, who are currently located in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Ethiopia and Nicaragua, each have unique limitations that they face within the coffee industry but jointly shared that they were seeking a solution that would actively make a difference in their lives. Part of the motivation for launching Paso Paso was to

prove to the industry that the existing model can be changed; specifically, the industry should actively seek ways to increase producer involvement across the entire coffee chain.

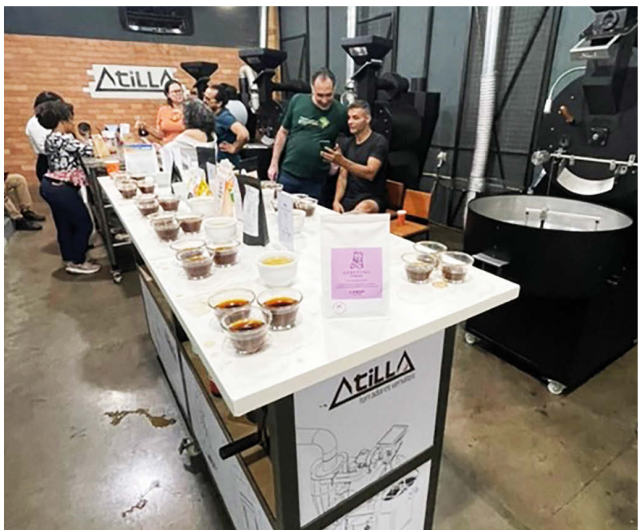
De Hoog, who has extensive experience as a green coffee buyer, had previously established positive relationships with each producer involved in the project. He hand-picked the participating producers, who stood out for their dedication, passion, and open-mindedness to challenge the status quo.

“I was inspired by Bram because it really is a unique business model. It is very different from what we see out there and the normal way of selling coffee. We’re feeling like pioneers,” said Diego Baraona, coffee producer at Los Pirineos El Salvador. “It’s kind of like a redistribution of power, giving a bit more to the producers and essentially starting to change the industry.”

The producers shared that one of the unexpected benefits of creating the company has been gaining insights from the different perspectives of each investor and then using these insights to make decisions about the

Bottom left:
Coffee cupping
Below: Checking
coffee beans during
roasting at Cafés
Muda

Images credit:
Co-Roasting





company. “We are combining our knowledge in our specific fields and putting a team together that is going to make sure that this project will [move] forward,” said Daniela Vega, producer of Roble Negro Costa Rica. “The business model is so different itself, [which makes it] attractive, [so] you want to participate and give your ideas to help the company grow because it’s your company as well.” Vega explained that she has felt a shift in the coffee industry as a whole as more individuals recognise the value producers provide to the industry and the necessity for increased economic acknowledgement.

The journey from concept to company launch has been a complex path. However, the producers have learned a lot about the industry and the logistics that come into play when developing a company with multiple owners from across the globe. “We’re showing already that you can make the impossible possible, and my only hope for the future is that this team will become even tighter,” said Hester Syoum Westerveld, coffee producer at Bette Buna in Ethiopia. “People talk about doing things differently and taking action, but we are actually just doing it and showing that it is possible. It has not been an easy process to start.”

Signing the paperwork, for example, required using embassies and notaries in respective countries or flying to Germany to complete all the documentation. De Hoog shared that he went to 13 separate banks before finding one

that would agree to sign on with the company. However, all members persevered in transforming the company from concept to reality. They are now looking forward to a future where there are opportunities for producers to play a more active role in the industry.

“We’re able to break that supply chain and set it up differently. Our goal is to create stability for our producers and develop an integrated loop between what we are producing, what we are roasting, and what we are selling,” said De Hoog. [We] hope to grow the company so that, say, in five years from now, the roastery is buying all of the coffee from a producer and expanding the opportunity to others.”

The continued adoption of the collaborative roasting model will challenge the industry to break down traditional boundaries and continually reinvent how the market can share a good cup of coffee. Coffee has always been a collaborative industry, with players coming together to develop solutions that will help ensure that the industry is sustainable. The model of collaborative roasting is another piece of the puzzle providing current and future players with tools and resources to propel the industry forward. ☺

Sorting coffee at Bette Buna farm in Ethiopia.

Image credit: Hester Westerveld

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