

BY JENNIFER HAZARD

PHOTOGRAPHY BY HUBERT SCHRIEBL

A Good Cup of Joe

Some like it strong and robust, others like it creamy and sweet, but in any case here are a few local hot spots where you can find a good cup of coffee.

Ah, the morning cup of coffee. It's a beautiful ritual that some might also consider a necessity. Without that jolt (or two) of caffeine, work is difficult. Intelligible conversation—challenging. Constructive thinking? Forget it. And while most agree that a cup of joe jumpstarts their day, that's where the similarities end. Ask regular coffee drinkers what kind they like best, and you'll get a variety of answers. Some like it strong and robust, others like it creamy and sweet, and still others appreciate a no-nonsense cup of black coffee.

To satisfy this range of tastes, there

are several distinctly different coffee purveyors in Manchester. The first of those is the Lion's Share Coffee Roasters. Husband and wife team Ric and Marian Jesmain, who acquired the Lion's Share Bakery in March 2006, offer 'Grade A' coffees from all over the world, including Kenya, Indonesia and Ethiopia. All of the coffee is roasted on the premises, which contributes to the shop's enticing aroma. While it may seem like a difficult process, Ric says patience is the most important part of roasting, as the flavor of the beans becomes more complex the longer they're roasted. He starts by roasting 10-12

Nothing could be more personal than how you like your morning cup of coffee



Marian Jesmain of Lion's Share Coffee Roasters

pounds of green coffee beans at a time. As the beans absorb heat, they eventually crack open and change from their original green color to a rich brown. The flavor of the beans relies on their country of origin as well as the length of time they roast. For example, a traditional French Roast is darker and roasted longer than a milder cup of Columbian coffee.

Ric says the Lion's Share caters to serious coffee drinkers, but as any smart business owner knows, there is so much more to a successful shop than coffee alone. To make the interior more inviting, Ric and Marian painted the white walls in cosmopolitan earth tones, opened up the floor plan and added a comfortable seating area. "We want to encourage people to stay awhile," he says. In addition to its new look, the Lion's Share now offers specialty coffee drinks, including lattes, cappuccinos, ice coffee and coffee coolers — all of which can be customized to customers' specifications. There's a host of homemade desserts and pastries, too, including some of Marian's favorite family recipes. And for those who can't live without their Lion's Share coffee fix, Ric is also developing an online mail order business.

Like Ric and Marian Jesmain, Mike Iglinski is also new to the coffee

business. He purchased Simple Coffeeworks in spring 2006 and quickly built a dedicated following. According to Mike, his shop provides a truly special, gourmet cup of coffee. All of the coffee at Simple Coffeeworks is organic, fair trade and shade grown — which, in simpler terms, means the coffee beans are cultivated and purchased in a way that benefits the environment, as well as the farmer. And while the coffee isn't roasted on the premises, Mike says he's part of a roasting co-op, which includes five other independent shops across the country. "The co-op creates a bigger buying group," he explains. "Without it, our small shop wouldn't have access to such great coffee."

Simple Coffeeworks sells coffees from Sumatra, Indonesia and Bolivia, as well as custom blends of their own. "All of our coffee is very strong," Mike warns. "It's not for the faint of heart." To that point, his most popular 'flavor' is called Simple Mudd — a dark roast that requires a serious coffee drinker's palate. Coffee can be purchased by the half-pound or pound and is individually bagged for customers. And whether you buy a cup at the shop or take a bag home, he promises a fresh product. "Nothing is roasted more than a week ago."

The cozy shop features low lighting and not surprisingly, those earthy



Mike Iglinski of Simple Coffeeworks

"coffee shop" colors. However, what makes Simple Coffeeworks unique is its art house vibe. Mike recently signed on to be a "Hot Spot" for Life=Art—a Vermont-based nonprofit organization that supports painters, poets, sculptors and musicians nationwide. "It's an amazing collaborative effort," he says. "The artists give my shop an identity, and at the same time, I'm helping support our local community."

For coffee drinkers with young families, or anyone else who wants a great place to hang out while they're drinking their joe, The Spiral Press Café is a popular spot. The café, which shares its space with the Northshire



Drew Bove of Mrs. Murphy's

Bookstore, often has morning customers lining up at its Bonnet Street entrance. At first glance, the café seems small and unassuming, but walk upstairs to its open and airy seating area and you'll understand why people gravitate here. Stephen Drusic, who contributes to the family-owned shop, says regulars are drawn to the relaxed atmosphere. "It's a gathering place where people can just sit and hang out." The eclectic space has brightly colored walls featuring local artists, cozy leather chairs and plenty of large tables.

Where to find your favorite coffee shops:

Lion's Share Coffee Roasters
48 Center Hill, Manchester
366-8272
www.lionssharecoffee.com

Maplefields
5023 Main Street, Manchester
362-1512

Mrs. Murphy's Donuts
374 Depot Street, Manchester
362-1874

Simple Coffeeworks
4746 Main Street, Manchester
362-5776
www.simplecoffeeworks.com

The Spiral Press Café
15 Bonnet Street, Manchester
362-9944

The breakfast and lunch menu at The Spiral Press Café is another reason to visit. All of the coffees they sell are from Mocha Joe's—a Brattleboro based company that roasts organic and fair trade coffee beans. And not to be outdone, the hotspot also offers organic teas, fresh baked goods (including locally renowned scones), homemade soups and sandwiches.

If you're more of a 'keep it simple, stripped down coffee shop' type, look



The Spiral Press Café offers a comfortable, relaxed atmosphere to sit and enjoy your favorite coffee

no further than Mrs. Murphy's Donuts. The neighborhood coffee and donut shop has been a Manchester institution for 30 years. Owner Drew Bove describes his shop as a throwback to the old days. Inside, Mrs. Murphy's has an understated, diner feel complete with counter seating and a few scattered tables and chairs. All of the donuts are homemade and their coffee supplier—New England Coffee—has remained the same since its inception. And while one flavored coffee is featured each day, Drew says it's hardly a draw. "Seventy-five percent of our customers drink regular coffee. Ours is an older, more conservative crowd."

That being said, Mrs. Murphy's also offers the garden house variety of specialty coffee drinks, including cappuccino, espresso and iced coffee. Not to be outdone by big chains, Drew adds, "We also have flavored coffee shakes for the young people." The most popular choice at Mrs. Murphy's is the House Blend—it isn't the strongest cup of coffee, but you can add a shot of espresso to give it an extra kick.

And is there a donut that comple-

ments the House Blend? Drew says it's really a matter of personal taste, but if he had to recommend one, his bet is on the cake donut. "It's the standard. There's no better donut for dunking into your coffee."

Beyond coffee and donuts, what makes Mrs. Murphy's special is the shop's small town atmosphere. Step inside and you'll find neighbors and friends talking about everything from sports to local politics. When I ask Drew if he minds the banter, he laughs and says, "It's more their place than it is mine."

For those who want their coffee to go, Maplefields on Main Street offers dozens of flavors of Green Mountain coffee. And further south on Route 7, Dunkin' Donuts provides the various coffee drinks New Englanders have come to expect from that chain.

Finding the right coffee shop is a very personal choice after all. And in Manchester, it looks as though there's something for everybody. ♦

Jennifer Hazard is a regular contributor to STRATTON MAGAZINE.