

Deja Brew

Georgetown is a city of suburban Williamson County, Texas. It holds a population of approximately 47,000 residents, and is home to Southwestern University, founded in 1840, the state's oldest university. It is known as the Red Poppy Capital of Texas, Retirement Capital of Texas and is nicknamed Gtown. Georgetown's historic downtown square has been named the "Most Beautiful Town Square in Texas," which has one of the finest collections of high Victorian commercial architecture found in the state today. There are 46 different structures contributing to the square itself, and although they all add a unique piece to the atmosphere, there is one place in particular that a certain social community is brewing. They call it Cianfrani.

Cianfrani has served the Georgetown area for the last 20 years and is an integral part of the square. The limestone building it resides in can't help but reflect its historic nature. Cianfrani has always called the square its home even when it was located across the street for its first 14 or so years of existence. The walls are painted a soft burnt orange, and the trim resembles the color of maple syrup, or possibly even a lightly roasted coffee bean. There are an assortment of tables and chairs, sofas and window seats, all with their own unique character. No matter the hour, the brisk aroma of coffee hangs in the air, and there's always a catchy tune playing in the background. Cianfrani supports local artisans and you can see their photography and paintings hung throughout the shop. There's a brass clock that hangs above the front door. Every time you visit, a friendly barista greets you with a warm smile, and if you go in often enough I'd bet they'll remember your name, and most likely your favorite drink.

There is this saying from a coffee guru, that "A perfect cup of coffee is made with love, picked with love, processed with love, shipped with love, received with love, roasted with love, and served with love." This is the exact vibe I got from Cianfrani. The coffee they serve is 100% premium arabica coffee that represents the top of the world's crop. Every batch is slow roasted in small batches in the back of the shop to maintain consistent quality flavor. Their baristas use their imagination to come up with different names for all of their different blends: Snicker-doodle, Coconut, Zoom, Dark Side, Java, Full City, Private Reserve, Antiquity, Sumatran, Kaffe Klatsch, Guatemala Antigua, and Ethiopian Yirgacheffe, just to name a few.

Before going deeper in to the social scene that calls Cianfrani home, let's look at a brief overview of the history of coffee, and where the rest of the world is at with today's coffee trend. Coffee has been around since well before the 15th century. It is said that the growing and drinking started in the Horn of Africa, where, according to legend, coffee trees originated in the Ethiopian provinces of Kaffa. In accordance with the Oxford English dictionary, the word "coffee" itself entered the English language in 1598 via the Dutch word *koffie*, which was borrowed from the Turkish word *kahve*, in

turn borrowed from the Arabic word qahwa, which is a truncation of “qahhwat al-bun” and that translates to mean “wine of the bean.”

Millions of people around the globe, start each day with a cup of coffee. Before that coffee was brewed and poured into each mug, it was planted and harvested a world away. That world is home to small scale farmers that base their lives around its production. Everyone recognizes a roasted coffee bean but unless you have lived or traveled in a coffee growing country, chances are you wouldn't recognize a raw coffee bean, or an actual coffee tree for that matter. Coffee trees are pruned in cultivation but can reach as tall as 30 feet, are covered with dark green waxy leaves, and along their branches the berries grow. Exocarp, mesocarp, parenchyma, endocarp and spermoderm. Those are the names given to the anatomy of a coffee cherry. What we call coffee beans are actually the seeds of a coffee cherry. It takes nearly a year for a cherry to mature, and a single tree can live as long as 20 or 30 years. The trees themselves can grow in a wide range of climates, as long as there are no sharp fluctuations in temperature, but prefer rich soil, mild temperatures, frequent rain and shaded sun.

Research estimates that 2,000 hours goes into a single cup of coffee from plantation to pour. Coffee, and everything that it encompasses, is a growing social norm in western society, a traditional cultural practice in many regions, has a history of political issues, and is an economic strong hold for many countries in the developing world. It is grown in more than 50 countries around the globe, but some of the most popular coffee growing locations include: Hawaii, Mexico, Puerto Rico, Guatemala, Costa Rica, Columbia, Brazil, Ethiopia, Kenya, Ivory Coast, Yemen, Indonesia and Vietnam.

America's wettest city, Seattle, is the foundation for coffee culture, among coffee drinkers in the United States. Many people in our culture, the first thing they do is involved with coffee, the flip of a switch or the push of a button, to start that mornings brew. And everyone does it differently. Some drink it black, some with sugar, others with milk, and some with all of the above. Everyone has their own thing. Combine all of those things with a coffee house, and it becomes this new magical thing. In every big city across the U.S. you can find a coffee shop, some commercial, some franchised, some local, but it's the down to Earth “Ma and Pop” coffee houses like Cianfrani that cultivate close communities ties such as the one on the square. The space of a coffee house is comfortable, the social interactions and the social meaningfulness are distinctive to its' world, and so is born the coffee house subculture.

A coffee house is a lot like a bar. There are those that go there to be alone, submerge themselves in their work for example, or read a good book. And then there are those that go there to socialize and be a part of a special group of friends. While I sat at Cianfrani “quality roasted, coffee company,” sipping my coffee from an actual coffee mug I didn't feel estranged from the rest of the guests, almost every person I made eye contact with gave me a warm smile, and it was apparent that for each person,

Cianfrani meant something to them. When you walk in the front door you can see that there is a certain dynamic to its layout. On the left side of the room there are about 8 tables lined a long the wall, each with a pair of chairs facing each other on either side, and near a convenient electrical outlet. That was the side of the room where several computers were illuminating guests tired faces, tablets were being scribbled on with notes from careful studying, and headphones were being used to drown out the rest of the shop and portray a sense of invisibility. On the other hand, the right side of the room had a long table, resembling one you might find in a dining room. Two sofas at an “L” to one another, and a pair of circle tables each with four chairs. On that side of the room there were guests cozied up on the couch reading a good book, old folk debating over the most recent political debate in the newspaper, and a group of several people of all ages gathered around that long table, chatting away. I admired the evident dynamics of the shop and decided to talk to that afternoons barista about it.

Her name was Ellie. Her hair was died a light shade of purple, she wore a plaid shirt, frayed jean shorts, and purple leggings underneath. She was extremely friendly, and very easy to talk to. Ellie is currently going to school alongside working. She has worked at several different places throughout her years including Roots Bistro, another local shop in the square, and at Starbucks. She made the awkward process of interviewing a complete stranger really quite a breeze, and I’m thankful for that, but then again, that’s what this whole subculture is about. It is built around community. When I asked Ellie why she left the corporate scene and now worked at Cianfrani she said, “I love working here because I feel like a real person. I love being able to look at a guest walking through that front door, and right away either know their name or what they’re going to order, or have an idea about what kind of day they are having. It makes people feel special, ya know? It makes my job feel important. And besides I just really love everything about coffee.”

She and I went on to talk about several differences between corporate and local coffee shops but what kept drawing me in, was the people that were there. Ellie said that they are most busiest in the mornings because that is the time when most of their regulars from Sun City are there. She said so many of them start their days off in the shop, and that it’s really a tight knit group. When that subject came up I couldn’t help but ask about the big picture on the wall. It was a painting of an older gentlemen sitting outside of Cianfranis. He was reading a newspaper, and had an infectious grin on his face. I was immediately interested to see if that was one of their regulars, and although she wasn’t quite sure, another guest (a regular she said was named Vince) piped up and said “Oh, that’s Louie! I used to see him outside the shop every morning, not really sure what has become of him but I’m sure if you ask Margaret (another regular) she could tell you all about him.”

After hearing Louie’s story I was hooked, and decided I would come at different times over the next several days to try and talk to some of the other regulars. Sure enough on a Monday evening while I sat outside Cianfrani, I was befriended by a

regular named Mr. McCoy. He and I both sat in the evening light outside Cianfrani's front door. He puffed on a cigarette, and asked me if I was a student at Southwestern. I said yes and proceeded to tell him I was writing an article about Cianfrani for my journalism course at the university and that was it. He practically spilled all his knowledge to me on a silver platter. Mr. McCoy has been a regular there for the past 12 years. One of my favorite stories he told me, was about the club at Cianfrani. He said it started back at the old location, when him and a few of his friends would start their mornings sitting outside of the coffee shop, in the old wire furniture, with the cross hatched patterned seats. It is called the "Waffle Butt Club." Referring of course to the patterns left on the regulars "hineys" after they got up. This club still exists today, he said there is no real membership, it's more or less just a group of storytellers and anyone can join in at any time, but most of the regulars partake in it. As our conversation continued for the next hour, he told me about Gwen Green, who knew "everything about everything" she was queen of the social circle. And Richard Cutts, who was the history guru, and knows everything about the square, its architecture and its history. And Anthony Mallord, their "rockstar" who used to set up his recording equipment and have open mic nights. And he also told me about Dawn Snell, a 91 year old man who visits Cianfrani everyday, and is the artist who did most of the work that is hung on the walls. Mr. McCoy and I had a great conversation, and I could really tell Cianfrani is special to him. As our conversation came to an end, "he said now you know all about this place, and if you need us, we'll be your family." That's what Cianfrani is to so many of the regulars. It's a home. Somewhere they feel accepted and comfortable.

There is definitely a subculture brewing within the walls of Cianfrani. The subculture is not exclusive, anyone can become a part of it, it's just a community, a routine that has developed among a group of coffee loving individuals that has grown in to a larger fostering of a sense of belonging. Next time your in a coffee house, a local shop, or perhaps maybe even on the square in Georgetown, stop by and see what the buzz is all about.

Contacts

Ellie, Vince, Andrew McCoy, Dawn Snell, Gwen Green, Richard Cutts and Anthony Mallord

Sources

"Coffee." Oxford English Dictionary. 2013. Oxford English Dictionary. Web. 25 Jun. 2013.

Kutcher, Ashton. "Specialty Coffee the Pursuit of Deliciousness." Online Video Clip. YouTube. YouTube, 30 Jan. 2013. Web. 24. Jun. 2013.

Unknown. "The History Of Coffee - National Coffee Association." Home - National Coffee Association. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 June 2013.

Authors Afterwords

Given the assignment of writing a third narrative in a two and a half week period was very intimidating. By the time I made it through the first two, I really was unsure how to even start on this article. I knew I wanted to do something on a subculture in Georgetown, and the more I thought about the everyday interactions I have with strangers, aside from being at work, the more apparent it became that that environment was coffee shops. I don't start every morning with a cup of coffee, and I don't go to a coffee shop everyday, but I go often enough to see that there is definitely something communal about it. Doing this reporting and researching on coffee and the subculture of it, was really interesting and I definitely hold a slightly different view of it than I once did. I wish that I was given a wider time frame, to really hash out the nitty gritty of the subculture, and the best way of trying to talk about it, but I guess that's the other lesson that there is to be learned. Time is limited, and getting that perfect piece of journalism down on paper isn't always going to be allotted a lot of time.

I hope this piece was in some way informative, insightful, and encourages people to take a closer aspect of all the little daily aspects in their lives. I chose to submit this article for the Fear and Loathing Collection because my other two articles dove into much more personal topics that aren't ready to be shared with the world. I learned a lot from writing this paper. It made me stretch my own boundaries in a place like a coffee shop where I am normally quiet, but comfortable. And I also learned a life lesson from Mr. McCoy. "Life is caught up in all the little details, and you control the details." So don't forget that and make the most of each assignment no matter how time restricted, the most of every day no matter how terrible it seems, and the most of all you do because you are the author to the story of your life, go live it.