

# ROASTRESS COOPS



**A**NNE COOPER IS A COUNTRY GIRL THAT HAS ROASTED UP A GREAT CAREER AS A MASTER ROASTRESS. SHE HAS ESTABLISHED HERSELF OVER 23 YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY, FROM BARISTA TO CAFE OWNER, TO COMPETITOR, TRAINER, ROASTER, JUDGE AND CONSULTANT INCLUDING A RAFT OF ACCREDITATIONS TO BACKUP THAT EXPERIENCE. RECENTLY SHE FORMALISED HER CREDENTIAL INTO A COFFEE ROASTING CONSULTANCY BUSINESS CALLED EQUILIBRIUM MASTER ROASTERS. CAFÉ CULTURE DELVE FURTHER INTO THE LIFE OF ANNE COOPER “COOPS” TO LET YOU IN ON A FEW THINGS YOU MAY NOT KNOW ABOUT THIS QUITE ACHIEVER.

## 1. WHERE DID YOU GROW UP AND HOW DID YOUR BACKGROUND INFLUENCE WHERE YOU ARE TODAY?

I was born in Nelson Bay, Central Coast NSW. At five we moved to Mackay where I completed all my schooling. It was here that I had my first contact with coffee as I would visit my aunt who had coffee trees growing in her yard. I didn't realise what they were until some time later - so maybe I was being influenced all the way back then into the world of coffee! I then moved to Brisbane for Uni. So yeah I guess I am a bit of a country/Qld girl.

I also grew up enjoying competitive swimming and more than anything I think my background in this sport and also coming from a solid family upbringing encouraged me to plan for the future, my very first job during high school was at the Mackay city council library! Looking back I realise that (especially with the repetitive nature of swimming in particular) it kind of makes sense that I ended up in a profession that is all about repetitiveness, instant results, trying over and over again, striving for perfection and consistency along with a little bit of independence and creativity as well. But also that generation of working hard to earn your way really made sense for me in the hospitality industry and the world of coffee.

I also love teaching and helping people, I find this extremely satisfying. I am naturally a server so it kind of seems natural for me to have landed in a service industry like coffee. Finding my way into coffee and eventually into a teaching/consulting role for roasting where I can satisfy my love of routine/repetitiveness and teaching/helping others is definitely where I belong, however back at high school I would never in a million years have thought I would have ended up where I am today though!

## 2. WHAT LED YOU TO PURSUE A CAREER IN COFFEE?

I think more than anything after having done two uni bachelor degrees (BArts & Bachelor of Design in Architecture) and realising that it would be a long time before really achieving anything (with architecture in particular), I recognised that I kept getting drawn back into working in cafes in order

to make ends meet - and I really enjoyed the service aspect and also the 'instant' results element of coffee - especially at the time as a barista and now as a roaster. It was really satisfying creating coffees for customers and seeing their positive reactions - no different to architecture, being given a brief by a client and you have to satisfy that brief - except in the world of coffee it takes 5 min. not 5 years!

So once I made that decision to stick with coffee, everything just all fell into place, especially with friends, colleagues and networking connections over the years, all supporting me in one way or another, for which I am very thankful and very grateful.

## 3. WHAT EDUCATION AND TRAINING DID YOU HAVE TO COMPLETE TO BECOME QUALIFIED? OR WAS IT VIA THE MANY JOBS YOU HAVE HAD ALONG THE WAY.

I have been really lucky in that over the last 23 years I have worked in some really great businesses that have allowed me the opportunity to work on certain skills over and over again in coffee - whether it be speed/efficiency, processes, creativity, product development, training, maintenance, management, learning different equipment, getting to know all the different origins and their nuances etc. So a lot of my experience has been learnt on the job and then reinforced by participating in industry events and competitions, which are great platforms for learning how to deal with everything from critiquing, feedback, skill development, politics of the industry, product development, product awareness, business, networking, self development and awareness etc.

The training and qualifications I have completed are the Cert IV training, Prepare and Serve Espresso and the Q Graders, as well as other various SCAA certified workshops and training sessions.

By regularly attending industry events/shows and workshops etc., I have made many great networks and industry friends and this has definitely led to awesome opportunities like working in the USA.

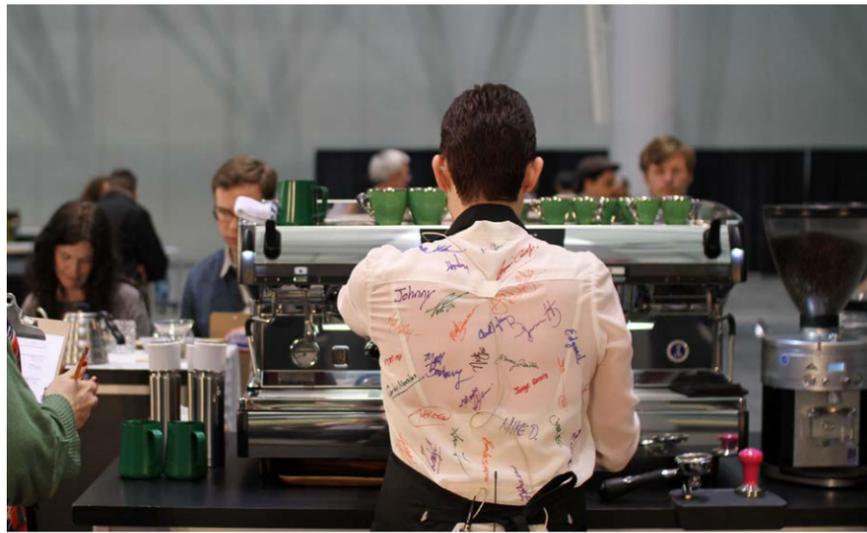


#### 4. YOU SPENT SOME TIME IN THE USA. HOW DID THAT COME ABOUT?

My husband had the opportunity to be sponsored to work in the US, so I have him to thank for the wonderful opportunity I had to be able to work in there. I spent four years working in New York. Initially I panicked, really doubting myself and I briefly came home thinking that I wasn't good enough! I then realised it was too good an opportunity to miss, I buckled up & went back and just networked and got out to various events and cuppings and this is where I met John Moore, the wonderful person who gave me the confidence and opportunity to work at Dallis Bros. as Head Roaster for their Specialty Coffee division. I also got a chance to put my Q graders qualification to good use in this role as well. I often think that working in New York is where I really had the chance to evolve and 'grow up' both personally and professionally in coffee, kind of my Carpe Diem moment in life where working in another country's coffee culture really made me step up and be the coffee professional I had always wanted to be, but I would also not have been able to do that without the amazing experience and grounding I had gained from working in coffee in Australia. Definitely a very valuable experience and one that I would recommend any Australian coffee professional to do at some stage in their career.

Working in the US was awesome as it allowed me to experience a different cultural palate and gain an overall understanding and experience with coffee. I also took the chance to dust off my competition tamper and compete in the US barista competitions, successfully going through the regional comps and qualifying to compete at USBC, which is quite a huge achievement and the closest I have ever come to competing in a stage as big as WBC. That certainly was a great experience for me and allowed me to meet, work with and put a face to many of the amazing industry names I had heard or read about. I also took it as an opportunity to try and spread the word and knowledge of Australian coffee as well, something I have been passionate about for many years and I would definitely like to see more support for Australian producers in future barista competitions.

#### 5. WHAT HAVE BEEN SOME OF THE BIGGEST CHANGES YOU HAVE



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#### EXPERIENCED IN COFFEE SINCE YOU STARTED?

- More precise, evolved barista focused espresso machine & grinder technology.
- More quantification of parameters - rather than relying on just tasting. There are many pros and cons to each side, but at the end of the day I will always say 'Taste is King' which is hard for a lot of people because tasting requires an informed, experienced palate to make that decision whereas quantification is a faster (perhaps less subjective) way out of that decision without relying solely on the skill of taste... as always, there is no right or wrong in coffee.
- Direct Trade - the level of traceability, transparency and relationships between roasters and producers. When I first started it was all about blends being imported with minimal info on the beans, origins etc. Now the door is wide open to direct trade opportunities and information about the producers and the coffee.
- More cafes roasting their own coffee and incorporating this into their shop design.
- Customers' palates appreciating different extraction methods and origins rather than blends - more 'Drinkers' are becoming 'Tasters' and really appreciating coffee in a wine-like manner...
- New Product development and collaborations/adoption of brewing techniques from other industries, especially between coffee and beer.
- Overall more information/education opportunities available for skill building and professional networking and development in coffee as a career.

#### 6. WHAT ARE SOME OF THE MOST COMMON QUESTIONS/ CHALLENGES THAT COME UP IN YOUR BUSINESS TODAY?

I get asked all sorts of questions in regard to people wanting to get into roasting, understanding the costs involved with equipment and green bean etc. In particular many roasters underestimate the costs of experimenting and making mistakes. Many don't realise that roasting is an industry where you need to experiment and make mistakes in order to learn and improve, which can of course be costly if you keep on making mistakes. So with my consulting I definitely aim to help roasters significantly improve their



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roasting profiles and the best ways to experiment, learn from this and thus improve their roasting as efficiently as possible at not too high a cost.

The common challenge in roasting in particular is the ever changing seasonal nature of the green. No roast is ever really the same and this can be quite unnerving for that roaster seeking perfection every time. This ever-changing nature also allows you as a roaster to get to know your roasting equipment better as well. So many other variables also have to be considered for every roast, decisions are being made every second along with watching, smelling, recording, distractions in the roasting room in general happening all at once...maybe that's why women make good roasters because we're good at multitasking. But in general, if you don't get to know a coffee origin then you will never be able to understand this ever-changing seasonal nature of why coffee roasting is such a craft and relies on building time and experience with your roasting equipment and the green coffee.

Seeking the perfect roast is also every roaster's biggest challenge! There is always a constant chase for perfection, which is what can make or break you as a roaster. It will eat you up if you let it.

I also often think that the internet is a big challenge for coffee in general, with coffee being such a practically based industry where it is all about hands-on experience, the internet may/will try to offer theories and shortcuts.

So it especially kills me when I get asked about roasting, "Are there any shortcuts?" You can buy all the bells and whistles, have all the most amazing equipment in the world and learn the 'skill' of roasting very quickly, but it's the green beans & equipment that take time to learn, thus why roasting is a craft that takes time, "time behind the iron" and it is this time behind the iron and experience in the roasting craft that I have and want to share with other roasters with my roasting consulting.

And lastly, with so many people wanting to get into Specialty roasting many roasters lack the practical background of working in manufacturing and production and so a lot of roasters don't know what to do 'beyond the cooling tray'. So with my vast experience in production I can show roasters how to better manage their roasting room production, especially with cupping and QC. Not enough roasters are tasting their coffees, QC checking their green beans and logging their roast data in a format that is easy for them to make decisions and move forward with their roasting, as unfortunately many see it as a big drag on time when it is such an important part of roasting.

#### 7. WHAT IS THE MOST REWARDING PART AND MOST DIFFICULT PART OF WHAT YOU DO?

Rewarding - I guess selfishly I get a real kick out of seeing and knowing that I have helped a roaster work through and better understand what they are doing with their roasting. I really love troubleshooting and problem solving and teaching along the way.

Plus I get to meet so many awesome people and help build a network

of roasters that can continue to grow and support each other as a roasting community.

Difficult, nothing really! I am doing what I love and really being able to embrace that as a career has been amazing. It can be a little bit scary being on my own but not too scary when I know there is so much awesome support from industry friends.

#### 8. WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE BEAN TO DRINK AND IS IT ALSO YOUR FAVOURITE TO ROAST?

I am a bit of a Natural process girl so I really like anything natural processed. They are a good challenge to roast and I enjoy a good roasting challenge! I also quite like Naturals as a pourover brew as I really enjoy how the brew evolves and changes as it cools. If especially roasted well, I like my naturals to have a 'boozy' heavy bodied, full, fruit sweetness with the acidity just revealing itself more toward the end of the brew as it cools = happy days!

#### 9. WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE ANYONE CONSIDERING A CAREER IN COFFEE?

Coffee is very much a relationship industry. Be prepared to build relationships & network your butt off. Be yourself, stand by your own uniqueness and interests in life and in coffee. And be prepared to do the hard work. Any serious career progression will take time and will be earned through good, solid, honest hard work. And it's ok to fail and make mistakes, especially with roasting. Don't beat yourself up in that hunt for the perfect roast. Learn from your mistakes and move onwards and upwards. Coffee can be very repetitive, lots of data collection, testing and trying and standing by your decisions. So if you don't have the confidence to own your own decisions and the patience to try and try again, don't get into coffee!

#### 10. HOW DID YOUR PASSION FOR T-SHIRT COLLECTING START, HOW MANY DO YOU HAVE AND WHERE WILL IT END?

I actually think it all started after seeing a few of the Cafe Culture tees I'd started to collect that I realised industry relevant tees would be great for wearing to work, and so the collecting kind of went from there. And then working in the US didn't help the obsession either as there was plenty to collect there so I also used the collecting as a kind of memento of my time working in the US as well. So far I have around 150, no where near Reg Barbers 400! Along the way I also realised I started collecting all sorts of other coffee things too - tote bags, hats, pins, cups etc. and of course my beloved tamper collection grew as well. I don't think it will ever end!

#### 11. WHAT'S NEXT?

For the moment I am super happy as long as I am able to continue delivering courses and workshops and really play a part in growing and supporting the Australian roasting community. My own roasting and training facility in the future is definitely something to head towards! And maybe also my own t-shirt design would be pretty awesome too!