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TRAVEL EDITS
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Preface

We at Monocle like simple things done well. That's why this month we focus on the essentials – a perfectly brewed coffee, sharply curated retail, and two blissful hotels – one whose build adheres to a traditional local love of limestone.

The Espresso Room:
London

While residents of Sydney, Tokyo and Portland have created their own well-loved and supported premium coffee shops, it's surprising how many in other cities have not. One glaring hole in the froth has always sat over London, where finding a good coffee shop can take the cunning of Miss Marple. Even then, at some point, the relationship always turns bitter – one morning the coffee just tastes bad and you realise the shots no longer hit the mark.

Ben Townsend is one of a new wave of bean connoisseurs who in the past few years – and especially past 12 months – have been infiltrating interesting pockets of the city and adding some craft. There's Dose Espresso near the Barbican, Climpson & Sons on Broadway Market and Flat White and Fernandez & Wells in Soho – and now, The Espresso Room in Bloomsbury. Townsend's site is compact, just 9.3 sq m, and is in a 1920s shop that, until recently, was a second-hand bookstore. The

- 01 The small and perfectly formed premises
- 02 Cakes and pastries are bought in as Townsend wants to concentrate on the coffee making, not baking
- 03 Every milky cup comes with a pattern etched in the froth
- 04 Hot shot Townsend
- 05 Townsend believes you need to invest in the best technology

makeover, with the help of furniture designer Tim Hitchens, uses three simple materials: poured white concrete for the floor, larch multi-ply for the counter and black Valchromat for the shelves. Then there are the benches for perching on indoors or outside according to the weather.

But no matter how immaculate the design concept, it's the coffee that matters. Townsend explains that his coffee epiphany came while working in Melbourne in educational multimedia. Townsend quit to train as a barista and soon became a trainer and coffee consultant himself in Australia and Blighty. But he wanted his own space.

"There's something exciting happening in London at the moment, it's a small revolution that is mostly being led by Australians and New Zealanders. What I wanted to do was match some of that Australian style with a high-quality design sensibility," he says.

Townsend sees himself as part of what in the US is known as the Third Wave. "First you had the Italian coffee shops, then the chains, now we are going back to being artisans. For any of the coffees I sell, I can tell you who the farmer is and who roasted it." The Espresso Room, and the whole London coffee renaissance, has been helped by the economy – not just because Townsend was store hunting as the chains slashed expansion plans. He's also benefiting from people wanting simple things done well. Up the revolution! — AT
theespresso.com



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What makes it work

Good business model: An affordable space not on a main drag. "If the coffee's good, people come."

Quality control: "What we haven't seen here until now is that Australian barista mindset where a person can make 500 coffees in a day and they are all perfect."

Tight vision: There are three coffees available – a blend, single origin and decaf.



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