

Passion makes an ideal brew

A barista spills the beans on what it takes to be at the top of her trade

AT first glance a house painter and a barista may not have much in common, but Zarraffa's Coffee's 2007 Barista of the Year will tell you there are definitely some similarities.

Patience, passion and a steady hand are just some of the qualities Belinda Zammit found useful when making the career switch from painter to coffee connoisseur eight years ago, starting as a retail assistant and working her way up to barista, supervisor and eventually store manager.

Having never entered a coffee store before joining Zarraffa's, Ms Zammit is now in charge of the Zarraffa's Training Academy at Harbour Town, where she passes her skills on to employees coming through the academy.

"There's so much that comprises being a barista," she said.

"You need to think about presentation, customer service and have an in-depth knowledge of the product and methods of preparation.

"The judges of the Barista of the Year mark us on the beverage itself.

"It needs to be the perfect

weight, temperature and appearance.

"We're also judged on knowledge and customer service.

"Even things like personality and awareness of surroundings affect the coffee experience."

Ms Zammit said there was much more to making the perfect cup of coffee than met the eye.

"There is a science behind the process and the product, and a good barista will understand it all, right down to the nuances of different coffee beans," she said.

"Beans, and hence the coffee they produce, can have different characteristics.

"They can be nutty, have a chocolate-like aroma, be light or full bodied.

"It's important to know your product as customers will ask."

However, Ms Zammit said not all customers were connoisseurs.

"I have had customers come in and ask for a cappuccino with no froth, through to people coming in wanting a sausage roll, not realising we're a specialty coffee shop," she said.

After working in the predominantly male-ruled painting trade, Ms Zammit has found the coffee-barista industry to be a female-dominated arena.

"It is becoming a struggle to find males wanting to become baristas," she said.

Ms Zammit will now take part in the National Barista of the Year finals against hundreds of other



Zarraffa's Coffee's 2007 Barista of the Year Belinda Zammit is passionate about her profession

baristas from all different companies, but says the reward comes in the job itself.

"I've had regular customers who wouldn't allow anyone to make their coffee but me," she said.

Ms Zammit said passion was one of the ingredients of a good barista.

"You need to have patience and

passion, you've got to want to do it and know your stuff," she said.

The Zarraffa's Training Academy is a replica of a standard Zarraffa's coffee shop, with technologically advanced equipment and accredited baristas.

The company's chief executive officer Kenton Campbell said it addressed the need for a custom-

ised educational program that gave franchisees an understanding of the science behind the art of espresso.

"Our training team has an extensive background in coffee blending, roasting and customer service, combined with practical skills that they are happy to share," he said.