

Get Out of the Fog and into more original cafe



Rebecca Wilson Emerald

Located at 839 Lincoln St., Out of the Fog offers a full line of organic and socially responsible pastries, coffee and espresso beverages.

■ Offering organic products and an ardent atmosphere, Out of the Fog goes beyond a typical coffee shop

By Rebecca Wilson
Oregon Daily Emerald

It is Wednesday afternoon, and Out of the Fog is packed with customers needing a caffeine fix. People in business suits juggle coffee mugs and briefcases as they hurry off to work, while customers with more time on their hands read, chat with friends, munch scones or banter with baristas.

This scene is familiar to coffee enthusiasts throughout the Pacific Northwest. However, Out of the Fog, going on its sixth year, offers an out-of-the-ordinary coffee-drinking experience for its clientele.

Christina Edmunds and Everetta Butler come here for the food, coffee and especially "the atmosphere," Butler said. "The people are really relaxed. They don't care what you look like."

"They love you no matter who you are," Edmunds said.

And, "everything is organic," added Butler. "Even us."

Owner Brad Lerch also emphasized the organic philosophy of his business.

"We want to give people the alternative of eating organic ... to show that it's possible," he said.

Out of the Fog uses Cafe Mam (pronounced "mom") coffee, which is grown in Chiapas, Mexico.

Lerch is part-owner of Cafe Mam and guarantees the coffee-growing process fits organic standards from start to finish.

Cafe Mam beans are also shade grown, which means the beans are planted around native bushes and trees, rather than in deforested areas.

"There's a lot of [organic] coffee imported and sold by people who don't know squat about organic," said Lerch, who lives on an organic farm near Eugene.

He explained that many cafes offer organic coffee, but "it's a waste of organic coffee to put bovine growth hormone milk in it."

In addition to organic cow milk, Out of the Fog offers organic rice and soy milk. But unlike most coffee shops, customers don't pay for alternatives.

"We're not going to charge individual people extra for being dairy-free," Lerch said.

Out of the Fog also offers a variety of organic pastries and a full espresso menu. The flavored syrups and chocolate mix are 100 percent natural, as is the extensive selection of vibrant loose teas. The spicy homemade chai comes in caffeinated and herbal varieties.

But Out of the Fog is known for more than tasty organic beverages

and pastries. The little cafe, which is located in an old house near the train tracks, received national publicity last year when it was mentioned in the May issues of Harper's Magazine and Rolling Stone.

Evan Wright wrote a profile of

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Chris Callahan
manager
Out of the Fog

an anarchist for Rolling Stone, titled "Swamp's Last Day on Earth." In the article, Wright called Out of the Fog "ground zero for Eugene's thriving anarchist population" and "a place where Santa Claus is just another capitalist oppressor."

Manager Chris Callahan expressed disdain toward media portrayal of the cafe.

"We're not contributing to capitalistic consumerism," he said. But the media "made us seem like we all wear black."

Dazzia Szczepaniak, another Fog manager, agreed.

"People don't know the difference between activists and anarchists," she said, emphasizing that the roots of the business stem from activism.

Owner Lerch attributed the cafe's unintentional anarchist image to its free speech policy.

"We're not Nazis about bulletin boards, and a lot of local businesses are very conservative [in comparison]," he said.

Tree Free Sunday is one manifestation of the business's activist attitude. Every Sunday, baristas refuse to use paper cups. People may drink beverages from glasses or mugs they bring from home. On every other day, customers are charged 15 cents for paper cups.

"Most people think it's crazy for a business not to give people what they want," Callahan said, but social conscience takes precedence over profit for Lerch and his employees.

The occasional disregard for customers' preferences hasn't affected customer loyalty, especially customers such as Butler and Edmunds.

"They let us sell our wares here," said Butler, who is an artist. "They don't mind if we make things in the shop."

"It's a second home," Edmunds said.

Out of the Fog is located near WOW Hall at 839 Lincoln St. It is open Monday through Friday from 6:30 a.m. to 8 p.m., Saturday from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. and Sunday from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m.

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