



TWEAKING THE FORMULA

Local coffee shops design their own versions of the Italian soda BY BRIT MCGINNIS

Seltzer water. Ice. Flavored syrup. These three ingredients make the one drink that any enemy of coffee can order at a café: the Italian soda.

Invented by Rinaldo and Ezilda Torre (also the founders of the Torani syrup company), the drink first grew popular in 1925 San Francisco. Today, there are more than a thousand different possible flavors of soda (care for a sip of toasted marshmallow?). But the recipe itself is so basic that it's easy for peddlers to fall into a rut. Luckily, coffee shops in Eugene are hard at work keeping it fresh.

VERO ESPRESSO

The Italian sodas sipped within this sprawling café are mild, not too sweet and definitely refreshing. The baristas work with all-natural syrups from the Bend-based company MySyrup, and the very Oregonian combination soda with lavender and blackberry syrups is one of their most popular. But perhaps most impressive is their homemade whipped cream, which has an explosive (but delicious) reaction when stirred into an Italian soda. "We have to tell people to be careful," says barista Reba Rice with a mischievous smile.

BARRY'S ESPRESSO BAKERY & DELI

Serving mostly a college and hospital crowd, this nifty shop on East 12th Avenue boasts a stunning 42 syrup options, though the availability of each flavor fluctuates. Raspberry is the most popular flavor (indeed, one of the most popular flavors in Eugene), but offbeat options like tiramisu and macadamia nut lure adventurous taste buds. There's no official rule at Barry's on how much ice or syrup the barista will utilize in mixing a soda. They'll just come up and ask the question all drink snobs and sugar addicts love hearing — how sweet do you like it?

PERUGINO

Next door to the historic Smeede Hotel, there isn't a single Torani bottle in sight at this café-slash-art gallery (they prefer CE, Monin and Café KaKow). In terms of style, Perugino offers sodas that are initially 75-85 percent ice (as opposed to the more typical 50 percent). Why so much? Baristas say they want to make sure that the syrup is never warmer than the rest of the soda — a real risk, considering most coffee shops store syrup bottles at room temperature.

MORNING GLORY CAFÉ

This bright vegan café has 12 basic flavors to mix and match, perfect for the traffic of Amtrak travelers and bustling breakfast crowds. "It's rare that people ask for something we don't have," says barista Liz Graessle. Morning Glory is unique in its stirring method — instead of using a rod to mix the ingredients, the baristas transfer the liquid to a second cup then back to the original. Graessle says that this guarantees the customer won't taste straight seltzer water in the first sip.

PERK ESPRESSO

Obsessed with fresh ingredients, the fledgling coffee shop is working toward the goal of using only syrups made on location. Owner Aaron Chester is especially proud of his caramel syrup, made from what he calls authentically "browned sugar." (A soda made with this syrup tastes like a liquefied Christmas cookie.) Perk also offers popular fruity options like cherry, but with a natural twist. If you're lucky, your raspberry soda will include fresh, locally grown raspberries crunched into the ice. ■

VERO'S ITALIAN SODA WITH WHIPPED CREAM

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