

Cairngorm is back on Frederick Street with a change of pace

An Edinburgh city centre coffee shop is reopening after repeated closures with one goal in mind: to provide the world's best coffee experience.

Cairngorm Coffee has come up with a plan to future proof its Edinburgh city centre branch, which first opened in 2014.

Such was its popularity among office workers and tourists that the Frederick Street venue alone turned over more than £250,000 in 2019.

However, with lockdowns, low footfall, and a staffing crisis caused by the “pingdemic”, the venue has since struggled and turnover was just £30,000 in 2020 and £55,000 in 2021.

Although city centre footfall dropped, Cairngorm Coffee thrived as online orders skyrocketed. The brand has since expanded its wholesale business and won a new legion of fans after opening in Bonnie and Wild at St James' Quarter. The company's Melville Street location continues to serve the West End of the city, as it has done since 2016.

Now Cairngorm Coffee founder Robi Lambie is hoping to restore Frederick Street back to its former glory with a business model ready for life in a post-pandemic city centre.

With less hustle and bustle to contend with, the Frederick

Street cafe will cater to the change of pace and increasing interest in specialty coffee by transforming the branch into “an immersive coffee experience” serving limited edition beans from around the world.

Robi said: “We are doubling down on what made our “OG” location great back in the day – the experience – but this is a complete revamp. I don’t think it’s enough to just open a run of the mill specialty coffee shop anymore. So many people make great coffee so we have to do more to compete. While the roastery and Melville Street are flourishing, Frederick Street wasn’t best prepared for the pandemic and it has struggled to recover from it, so we’re going to be aggressive and relentlessly ambitious to make sure we’re ready for the cost-of-living crisis.

“We will stop at nothing till we’ve created the most well-rounded, immersive coffee experience possible. Visiting our shop will be an event, during which people slow down and truly appreciate the very best coffee, rather than just guzzle it on their way to work.

“We’ve renovated the space to return to the essence of what this shop was when it opened, which is all about community and bringing the very best coffee possible to our customers. I love the idea of customers getting to know each other around one big table as they learn about coffee. We want it to be as approachable and welcoming as possible.

“I believe Frederick Street can be more than just a coffee shop. We’ve been inspired by some of the world’s top coffee venues that we’ve visited on our travels, like Coffee Collective in Copenhagen, Sub-Zero in St. Kilda’s, Aunty Peg’s in Melbourne, and George Howell Coffee in Boston. We want to bring the essence of what we love about them to Edinburgh, but put our own spin on it.”

The venue’s repositioning as an experiential brand home is the

next step of a five-year plan devised by co-owners Robi Lambie and Harris Grant for Cairngorm Coffee to become one of the world's leading coffee roasteries.

As part of this strategy, the company has recruited Adrian Manusco, one of the coffee world's most respected experts as Head of Coffee. The Australian who has more than 15-year's experience in the industry is a Q grader (arabica), AST trainer and World Brewers Cup Judge.

Adrian, who has previously worked for Minor Figures and Five Senses Coffee in Melbourne, will curate the very best of coffee from around the world for the menu. On opening week, beans from Nomad in Barcelona, Spain,, Lucid in Belfast, Northern Ireland, and Black & White in North Carolina, USA, will be on the menu alongside coffees from Cairngorm's own roastery in Leith.

All coffee will be available as a limited edition – Cairngorm will only ever buy-in enough to make 50 cups of each whole bean.

Adrian commented: "We're excited to be able to showcase the coffee we've been drinking at home and celebrate our friends in the global coffee community.

"Coffee is a natural product, which means it deteriorates as it ages. We'll be freezing every coffee so people can taste it at its very best.

"Frederick Street will be a safe environment for people to learn to love specialty coffee. When you walk in through the door, our job will be to provide a truly curated service – we'll spend time with every single customer. We'll find the exact coffee that will suit your tastes: it's our job to find what you really want, not what you think you want.

"I get that this all sounds incredibly pretentious, but we ask people to come with an open mind. We promise you the most

welcoming, least scary experience possible – and you’ll leave appreciating coffee more than you ever thought was possible.”

Each customer will be guided through a choice of three different espresso beans and a wine-style hand-brewed filter menu with 15 different options – with plans for this to exceed 100 by the end of the year.

The cafe will open from 9am to 5pm on Wednesday to Sunday. The space will be used as a space for cuppings, recordings and events on Mondays, Tuesdays and evenings.

Long-standing barista Matt Mitchell will return to Frederick Street as head barista after a stint at Melville Place, while Hannah Dear has moved from Ledger Coffee Roasters in Wisconsin, USA, to join the team as manager.

