

Capital Coffee – Format Coffee

Format, at 124 Buccleuch Street, has steadily built a reputation as a leading place for specialty coffee in the city.

In this busy studenty area, Format faces a lot of competition, especially from Cult Espresso two doors along, one of Edinburgh's most revered coffee spots. More recently the Greek influenced The Lady and the Bear has opened nearby. For Fomat's proprietor Andrew, this a challenge but also an opportunity as more people are now being drawn to the area in search of coffee, pastries and savoury bites.

In contrast to Cult Espresso and The Lady and the Bear, with their spacious interiors (teeming with lap-topping students at busy times), Format is a snug little place with tables for about ten inside – as well as some seating outside. An improved interior features a roughened concrete surface offset by plants that soften the look.

The highly stylish custom made machine produces consistently flavoursome and memorable coffees. The machine allows the barista to make very subtle adjustments to pressure, enabling them to get the very best out of the beans. Format uses beans by a range of roasters, giving customers a variety of flavours over the months. Roasters used include local roasters Williams & Johnson, based in Leith, and Elsewhere Coffee from south London. Recently they've been using beans from another local roaster, Obadiah Coffee. Obadiah's Brazilian beans provide an 'elegant soft stone fruit acidity'. Its stark richness means

they are best used with drinks (such as a cortado or flat white) which allow the milk to take the edge off the acidity.

As well as coffee, Format serves tea (by the Brew Tea Company), hot chocolate and a range of pastries (just don't try and eat the ones in the window as they have been varnished!). For a more substantial snack, Format do some excellent filled bagels with the smoked salmon version being particularly tasty.



Andrew is enjoying a 'calm and steady' start to September after a 'crazy' Festival period. Because of their proximity to George Square, Summerhall, and other venues, they had a great deal of traffic. He also had to deal with delays with a makeover of the interior which was completed just three days before the Festival began. They also suffered a breakdown of their machine due simply to the high volume of coffees being pulled. Luckily a back-up machine and his colleagues helped them get through ("it was stressful but we got through"). Recruiting staff able to maintain Format's high standards has been one of Andrew's biggest challenges but he's recently managed to find some young baristas with the requisite dedication and focus.

Andrew is evangelical about speciality coffee and always keen to chat coffee matters with customers. One thing that Andrew stresses is that specialty coffee is a labour intensive product in all the stages (growing, roasting and preparation). Skill and meticulous attention is required at every stage. This, combined with rising transport costs, inevitably leads to fairly high prices. Andrew emphasises the fact that many cafes in Edinburgh use cheaper 'industrial coffee'. However, the cafes which use this often charge the same prices as those which use premium specialty coffee. Places such as Format are focussed on demonstrating the superior flavours you get with carefully sourced, well-made specialty coffee.

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