

Marchmont coffee shop worth the detour

A consistent theme of this column is that good coffee is not easily made.

While specialty coffee culture and language (artisanal, third wave etc) has spread quickly in the last decade and a half, only a select number of places really have the *art* to produce high quality espresso on a consistent basis. In the last few years, many places have found it difficult to recruit and hold onto very capable baristas. During the Covid lockdown of 2020 and 2021, many baristas moved into other jobs and haven't returned. There is, in the city, a considerable shortage of top class baristas.

Good baristas focus on the job in hand. They don't, like a barista I saw in a chain recently, tried to combine checking his phone, chatting to colleagues about his weekend and making espresso! This lack of focus and seriousness (as well as technical know-how) is why the coffee served by most of the chains is so inconsistent – and generally mediocre. With the beans and machines they have, they should be able to produce much better.



[Detour Espresso](#) in Marchmont is certainly a place with a serious attitude to coffee. On a recent visit, the two baristas were discussing the fact that the espresso wasn't flowing with the smoothness they desired; it wasn't quite 'dialled in'. So, they took time to make the necessary adjustments rather than just continuing to serve something below their usual standards. When customers are paying well over 3 quid for their coffee, they deserve something well made that makes the best use of the beans. While serious about the coffee, the atmosphere at Detour is not austere and overly cool.



In fact the place has a very chilled vibe, with lots of warm, friendly interaction between the customers and the baristas. In many ways Detour is representative of the way that cafes have, in recent years, taken over some of the social roles previously associated with pubs. Increasingly they are becoming social spaces. On my last visit, there was lots of chat involving Detour's boss Matt Rees about the music choices. When I entered, they were playing some early Tom Waits which helped create a chilled, jazzy vibe. Later the music became distinctly more up-tempo. The music isn't just in the background but is a talking point, helping to create the right atmosphere. In the corner of the café, an engaging science lesson for kids was taking place. It all added to a

friendly, community feel with a range of people of different generations.



Detour generally serves coffee by [Machina](#), one of Edinburgh's leading coffee suppliers – who roast their coffee at Peffermill. Machina, launched in 2013, is one of the most renowned names in specialty coffee in Edinburgh. They now have their large, stylish café in Marchmont. Along with [Argyle Place](#) a few yards away, Detour faces plenty of local competition. However, the number of students and young professionals in the area means there is space in the market. Detour has been consistently busy on my last few visits. Some customers clearly use it as a bit of a work base, though laptop free tables are also available. There's a nicely

curated selection of books on sale (they also host a New Writers Group), again adding to the sense that the place isn't merely a place to drink coffee. It's also a place to study, work, discuss music or lose yourself in a good book. Detour also features the work of artists and photographers on wall – nice exposure for local creatives, as well as adding to the visual appeal of the place. The high, corniced ceiling gives the place a airy feel, while simple furniture helps it feel uncluttered even when busy.



Food wise, Detour offers toasties, quesadillas, soups, smoothie bowls and a selection of baking. They also sell Machina's beans – and also those and the excellent James Gourmet Coffee, based in Ross-on-Wye. Detour has been in business since August 2018. Detour previously had a second café in the famously 'posh' residential area of Morningside,

opposite the old post office. They decided to sell this on to some of the staff who now run it as POP Coffee. Detour in Marchmont is an excellent spot on the Edinburgh coffee scene, combining chilled, friendly vibes with high quality espresso.

Detour Espresso, Argyle Place, EH9 1JT.