

latte art



It's all well and good to have an amazing-looking coffee, but underlying it all is the taste, that only comes with a great quality espresso!

Latte art comes in two forms, the first being 'free pour' where the milk foam, provided by the movement of the milk jug, is used to separate the crema of the coffee. This is intrinsically the more difficult of the two forms, as it requires an understanding of the milk's density and the barista's skill in weighting the pour, to create the perfect pattern you'll see demonstrated.

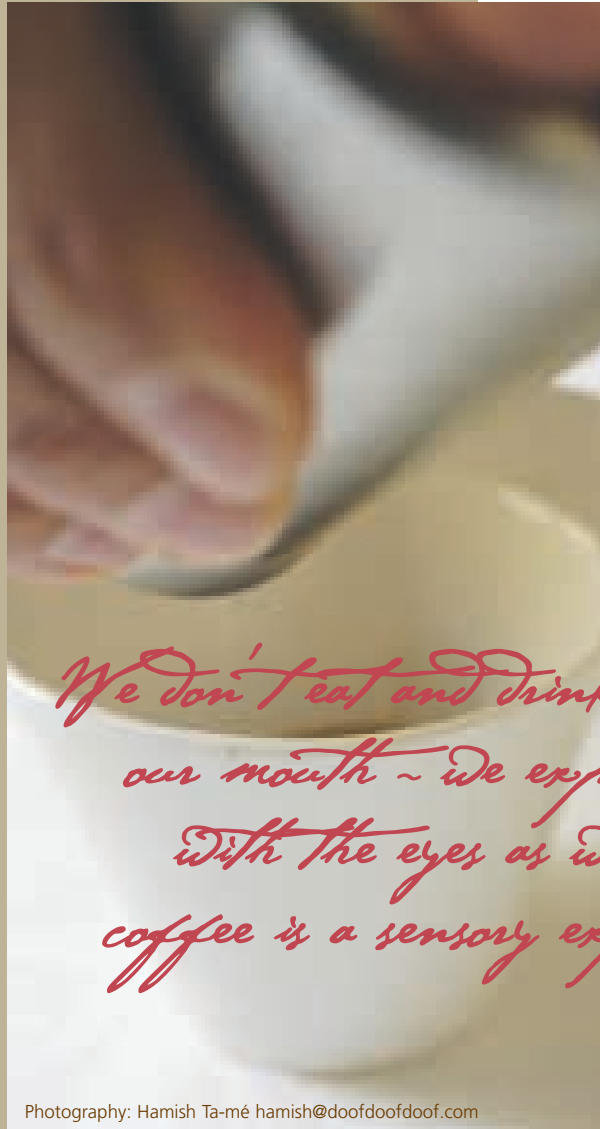
The second form is the 'etching' technique, which typically involves using chocolate, milk foam and an etching tool to scribe through the chocolate and coffee surface to create symmetrical patterns.

The former method has derived from the last century of Italian espresso coffee-making, while the latter (layering & etching) is a direct result of the nouvelle cuisine movement of the '80's. The so-called 'feathering' used in sauces and coulis in this well-known cooking movement has been transposed into the etching of designs into the milk and crema of a coffee.

Starting out

One of the skills to begin with is getting all the basic ingredients right – extracting great espresso, texturing your milk (including getting the right ratio of espresso to milk) and the quality of the liquid chocolate being used.

The technique for melting the chocolate is to use the *bain marie* style – pour a little water in the bottom of a deep saucepan, rest a stainless-steel bowl containing the chocolate on top and use the heat of the steam to melt the chocolate. Once melted, run through a sieve to remove lumps and air bubbles and transfer to a squirter bottle, preferably one with a fine-tipped nozzle. Try and keep this warm during the process (to maintain the viscosity of the chocolate) - note: the quality of the chocolate is important – it should be a premium quality



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Photography: Hamish Ta-mé hamish@doofdoofdoof.com

chocolate (of around 70% cocoa content) – definitely not Cottees chocolate in a bottle!

Both of the etching examples (see the following pages) require you to start off by creating a blank canvas - you need to fold the espresso and milk together so that there's a homogeneous-coloured area to work on. To get this right, we recommend you spend some time on the section entitled 'milk texturing' on the next page.

We don't eat and drink only with our mouth – we experience food with the eyes as well. Likewise, coffee is a sensory experience - we experience the milk-based espresso coffees we drink visually, as well as by taste, and this is the starting point for what's commonly called *Latte Art*.

milk texturing

spiders web 01

Probably the simplest of the 'etching' examples, since all it requires is the creating of the canvas, layering chocolate into a spiral on top, then etching out from there.

STEPS • Begin by creating a blank, even canvas of espresso and textured milk • Create an outward spiral with your chocolate (from the centre to the rim) • Etch clean, even lines with a skewer from centre out to rim (at 90 degree angle), then etch lines back in to the centre – alternating inward and outward etched lines.

Note: When you're etching the lines, (whether starting from the centre and moving out, or starting at the outside and coming back in) it's important to etch the line in one movement, and remember to clean the etching tool after each stroke.



GETTING YOUR MILK right is an extremely important part of the process. Here we run through the basic steps of steaming your milk (or 'texturing'). There are effectively two phases in the texturing process – firstly creating the foam, and secondly, bringing the milk to the correct temperature.

Start with fresh, cold milk (never re-heat your milk) and a clean jug. Pour the milk to a level approximately half-way in the jug – this gives you the best control when texturing and pouring the milk.

Rest the spout of the jug up against the steam arm, insert steam tip beneath the surface of the milk, tilt the jug on a slight angle, then apply full-steam pressure. Note, it's important to position the nozzle of the steam arm about a centimetre away from the edge of the jug – ie it shouldn't be resting right up against the side of the jug.

Slowly lower jug down the steam arm. This should cause a gentle hissing sound, which is the outward sign that foam is being created.

Once you've created enough foam, bury the steam tip underneath the surface to bring the milk up to temperature (between 60 – 65 degrees); then turn off steam.

Wipe the steam arm, then bang the jug on the bench (to collapse any surface air bubbles). Roll the milk and foam together as one, by rotating the jug – this should create an acrylic-like velvet texture. Note: it's important to 'roll' the milk right up to the point at which you pour your drink - this helps prevent the milk and foam from separating.

Rest the spout of the milk jug up against the rim of the cup and pour evenly and consistently into the centre of your cup. This will create an even 'canvas' on which to prepare etched latte art (first two examples – following pages).

chocolate cross

02



It's important to have a jug with an open, curved-lip spout

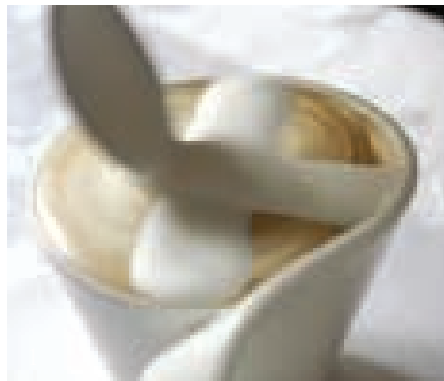


Starting point for both 'etched' examples is a blank, even canvas

This is the next level up in terms of difficulty of the 'etched' examples of latte art, because it incorporates an initial stage of laying the foam onto the surface of the coffee.

STEPS • Begin by creating a blank, even canvas of espresso and textured milk. • With a jug of textured milk, scrape across the surface with a spoon, taking only foam (no milk), and 'layer' the foam across the canvas, at right angles. • Lay down thin lines of chocolate, as shown. • Finally, using your etching tool, spiral out from the centre to the edge of the cup.

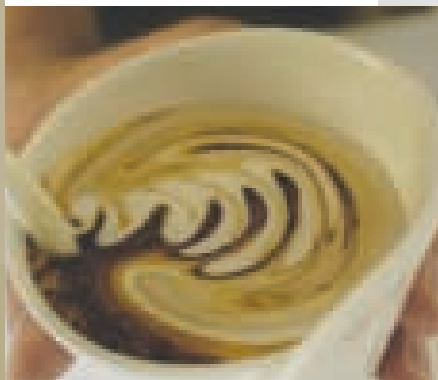
Notes: when laying the foam from the spoon to the canvas, apply the foam strips at a measured pace, so that the actual strip is an even width - no thick globs! It's also important to make them as symmetrical as possible (in terms of their right-angular alignment). When you're laying down the strips of chocolate, note that the weighting with which you apply them is important - if it's applied too slowly, the lines will be too thick and the chocolate will fall through.



notes

- Always purge the steam wand beforehand, releasing any condensation that's built up.
- The trick to getting a rich dense texture is to have the milk absorb a smaller air bubble, which is why we lower the jug slowly. If you lower it too quickly, you get a larger air bubble, creating a fluffier, 'Mt Everest-style foam.'
- Part of the skill lies in creating the specific amount of foam that you need for the drink type - ie you need more foam for a cappuccino than a flat white. When creating latte art, it's always good to have a little extra foam, which can be poured away if not needed.
- To get the most effective result, it's important to get all of the stages right, starting off with the quality of the espresso (a dark, rich coffee crema) with excellent surface tension. When you're texturing your milk you're after a dense, velvety texture, so that the strength of the foam is able to hold up the weight of the chocolate you're laying down...

Remember that order is important - prepare the espresso first, followed by texturing the milk.



rosetta 03

This is an example of the 'free pour' method, and by its very nature is more difficult than these previous two examples. Timing is critical and the skill lies in 'weighting' the pour and movement of the jug, which requires an intuitive understanding of milk's viscosity and the way it inter-reacts with the underlying coffee and crema.

STEPS • Pour the espresso. • Texture your milk, rolling right up until the moment you're about to pour, then tilt your cup, to create extra surface area. • Pour milk into the centre of the espresso, filling to approximately half way. • Continue pouring with the spout of the jug positioned at the front of the cup, then pull back towards you (as shown in the diagram) with an even, side-to-side movement. • Finally, pour away in one steady motion, to create the stem of the Rosetta.

Notes: It's preferable to have a jug with an open, curved-lip spout when doing a Rosetta, and the spout of the jug should be kept close to the surface as you are pouring (with the side-side motion). To create a marbling effect - pour chocolate on top of the crema of the espresso (at step 1) and let it caramelize on the surface - then proceed to pour.

Creating latte art designs are a lot of fun and are only limited by your imagination. However, by following some of these basic techniques, you can then apply them to create your own unique masterpieces!

Check out Paul's *Living Coffee Series*

a unique combination of practical coffee insights and an intimate insider's look into the many facets that make up today's coffee culture. Throughout the 13-part series, Paul explains how to create the perfect espresso drinks and gives an in-depth look at the whole process of coffee, from the bean to the cup. Saturdays at 5.30pm and Sundays at 9.30am on The LifeStyle Channel, Foxtel, Austar and Optus TV.

Editor's note: By its very nature, the rosetta is difficult to represent in print - check out our website: www.cremamagazine.com.au where we will be placing an animated version from next month!



'Jug, fine-tip nozzle squirter bottle, spoon skewer, fine mesh chocolate duster.