

Spilling the Beans: What I Learned From 5 Minneapolis Coffee Shops In 3 Hours

These are the best drinks from cafe faves on the Twin Cities Caffeine Crawl this year—plus sophisticated brewing methods and tidbits of coffee trivia

By **Kelly Allen** - August 3, 2017

When I thought I had heard it all, the most genius ways to indulge this summer—food truck festivals, movie nights in the park, the very existence of a mac-and-cheese grilled cheese—I ran into this brilliant idea: a caffeine crawl. It's like a bar crawl, but with coffee (and tea and chocolate).

Sure, you could go to a coffee shop, grab a cup of Joe, and move on your merry way. But the crawl, developed by beverage-marketing company [The LAB](#), lets you dig deeper—to learn how local baristas, tea sommeliers, and coffee roasters make what they make. (Really, they had me hooked at “caffeine crawl.”) Crawls occur in cities across the country, and luckily for me, the Twin Cities was one among 16 cities chosen in this year's lineup, for its fourth time since the crawl's inception in 2011. Hitting up cities once a year for only one or two days, this trademarked event remains one-of-a-kind here. (Check out upcoming Wisconsin crawls [here](#).)

Six routes were available, each offering five to six stops. In deciding which poison to pick, I took into consideration which coffee shops I had already been to, which I hadn't, and price. I chose a route with only five stops, the ticket price \$32 as opposed to \$36 (with six stops). The route I chose was a biking or driving route. I opted to drive. Why? I'm lazy and don't fancy the idea of sweating while sipping on hot coffee (even though I do that every morning during the summer, anyway). I discovered that all of my fellow crawlers opted to bike. Apparently I was the only lazy one in the bunch. In my defense, many of them were experienced crawlers—some came from out of state, including Nebraska—so they were dedicated and knew what they were doing. From 9 a.m. to noon, here's what I learned from five of our most beloved coffee shops in the neighborhoods of south Minneapolis.

Our first stop: [Wesley Andrews](#) and its Japanese method of drip coffee. At 9 a.m. sharp, we arrived to the sight of a gorgeous little storefront decorated with flowerpots—a sight for sore eyes...or a girl in need of her daily caffeine fix. The inside introduced marble and wood furniture well lit by natural lighting from the storefront's windows.



PHOTO BY KELLY ALLEN



PHOTO BY KELLY ALLEN

At Wesley Andrews (a combination of the middle names of the two owners), one of the baristas gave us samples of Kyoto Cold Drip Coffee and showed us the contraption that made it. It looked as though it belonged in a chemistry lab: the Kyoto coffee tower. The tower is part of the Japanese slow-drip cold brew process. Compared to overnight, this hourglass-like drip...by drip...by slow drip imbuing the coffee with a s



photo by kelly allen



photo by kelly allen

Next on the itinerary: [Big Watt Beverage Co.](#) was founded in the basement of the King Field neighborhood's relatively new [Five Watt Coffee](#) by some of the owners. Big Watt specializes in bottled cold-press coffee. Two of the five founders showed us their production garage, where they keep several machines, including one for roasting. Although none of the founders have degrees in chemistry—two having studied music, another one a lawyer—they wanted to find a way to make a bottled coffee using no added flavors, no stabilizers, and without pasteurization. (Pasteurization, by the way, sterilizes liquids such as milk at high temperatures to destroy certain microorganisms.) Their goal: a pure coffee that doesn't lose its taste over time. The bottled beverage they came up with simply contains coffee and water, and it has a shelf life of one year. They say whether you open it on day 1 or day 365, it'll taste smooth. That's because, when coffee is pasteurized, it hits around 180 degrees, and in one of their machines, they can keep the coffee at 40 degrees instead. (It never reaches a temperature more than 55.) The owners told us that if the final product is going to be cold, it should never reach a hot temperature, as that can d



photo by kelly allen

In the same vein, I learned that because oxygen affects flavor, microwaving your coffee makes it lose its taste. So drink fast or find a way to enjoy the beverage at a lukewarm temp. At the end, we each received a bottle of their cold-press Circuit Bender, because you can't hype this groundbreaking drink and then not let us try it. It was phenomenal and smooth, just as they said.



photo by kelly allen

Next up: [Blackeye Roasting Co.](#), where nitrogen—that odorless, transparent gas—made for some foamy variations. We tried three drinks: the Bad Larry, a nitro cold brew with lavender syrup and chocolate milk; a straight, nothing-fancy nitro cold brew; and Nitro Fog, a nitro black tea cold brew with vanilla syrup and half-and-half. In the Bad Larry, you could really taste the hints of lavender—a flavor I've never had in coffee before. The straight nitro cold brew was good, but the Nitro Fog surprised

crawl was that it has its cold brews and teas on tap, and they gave us bottle openers, keeping up the pub-crawl style quite nicely.



photo by kelly allen



photo by kelly allen

From Blackeye Roasting Co., we made our way to [Peace Coffee](#) for some tea. Inside the red exterior and bright blue entrance, we gathered in a room separated from the bustle of the shop. We sampled sparkling teas. One, called Runner's High, prevailed as my favorite for its organic hibiscus and Omija (red Korean) berry flavors blended with fermented green tea and other herbs that produce an overall tart-sweet, fruity flavor—not to mention its appealing blush of rosé color. The brew came out on top because it was also one of the two caffeinated options along with Black Limon, a blend of Thai black tea and blackened lemon citrus peel with hints of caramelized graham cracker. (No surprise, my favorites were the caffeinated ones.)



photo by kelly allen



photo by kelly allen

Our final stop was as cozy as its name: [Fireroast Café](#), where we made our way into a snug section of warm-toned walls covered in art and were greeted with warm, espresso-infused, flourless, lightly powder-sugared brownie bites with an espresso glaze. They were magical and without a doubt the best brownies I've ever devoured. I had two. Then we sampled three hot coffees and received a tasting wheel to help us identify flavors—including rubber, sour, pu its low-toned richness, frui

I'm not sure if I actually tasted walnut or if my mind was making that up after getting to know the tasting wheel.)



photo by kelly allen



photo by kelly allen



photo by kelly allen

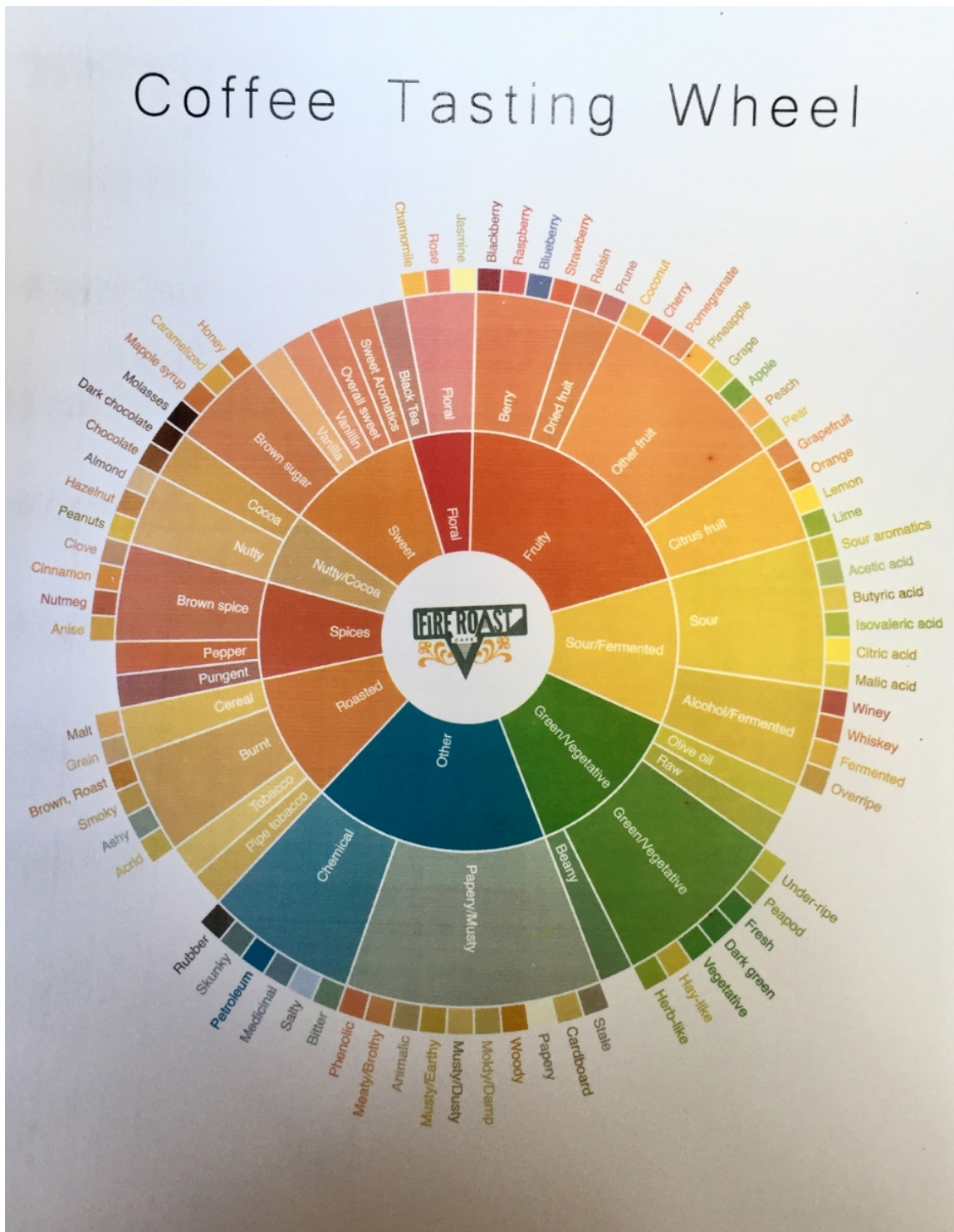


photo by kelly allen

While mingling, I learned from some of the coffee-aficionado crawlers, too: Coffee beans, for instance, come from berries that you could mistake for red grapes.

The day included an after party where we were invited to [Up Coffee Roaster](#) for café drinks, appetizers, booze, and the ultimate barista latte art throw down.

The experience overall left made these rounds on my

expensive). I never felt rushed at the shops, and it was exciting to be surrounded by people who were as pumped about coffee as I was/am.

Until next year (hopefully), I'll continue caffeinating my way through the coffee-shop gems of the Twin Cities, pretending as though I'm on a yearlong crawl by asking questions and taking full advantage of the flavors each has to offer—as you should, too, living close to or within this beverage-loving metro. And I'll likely find myself in Madison August 26, or in Milwaukee August 27, for the next crawls in The LAB's lineup this year. Check them out [here](#).

By Kelly Allen

Kelly Allen