

Milk Frothing and Latte Art Tips



“I’ve made the perfection of latte art a goal for everyone at Matthew Algie, because the perfect rosetta on a cappuccino or latte indicates that every factor of the coffee-making process has been perfected. Without a true shot of espresso, the correctly foamed milk, the proper cup, commitment to training, and the right sort of attitude you won’t get latte art.”

-David Williamson of Matthew Algie

That statement completely sums it up. Be attentive to every beverage, master the alchemy of turning milk into perfect microfoam and delight every customer with the perfect drink. Every day, every barista and for every customer: a perfect drink. Here are tips for making it happen.

Desire

You have to have the curiosity and desire to learn the subtle nuances that separate an average coffee shop from a great coffee shop and that is the preparation of the beverage. When a customer orders based on what drink won’t be too “bad”, that’s not a good sign. What can you do even better? Where is there room for improvement? What drives you to want to make a great drink every time? There has to be some deep desire to excel, serve, be the best, surprise our customers...that can be summed up in DESIRE.

Milk

More can be done in the preparation of the milk to screw up or improve the quality of a latte or cappuccino than any other aspect of drink preparation. The first experience a customer has sipping a milk based drink is the “mouth feel” of the beverage.

Perfecting the creation of micro-foam which brings out the natural sweetness of the milk and carries all the flavors has to be our goal.

Froth

Essentially, there are two stages involved. First is the introduction of air into COLD milk which helps release the natural sweetness of the milk. Second is the TEXTURING where the tip is submerged about half way in the milk creating a whirlpool or swirling wave of milk. This integrates the milk and air while stretching the milk toward the final volume.

1. Set-up: The longer it takes milk to get from start temperature to 100°, the smoother, denser, sweeter and richer the foam. Milk is receptive to taking on air only when it's cold, before it reaches 100°. **Tips:** • Cold, clean pitcher. • No aeration over 100°!
2. The start: Blow out the steaming wand first to remove any water before putting it in the pitcher.
 - Start with the wand under the surface of the milk.
 - Think of this as milk “texturing” rather than steaming.
 - When the steaming begins, you want a slight “ch ch ch” sound from the wand. This is where you introduce air into the milk. No sound or roar: you are not foaming the milk, you’re cooking it (jet engine whine). Too much sound, the tip is too high! You’ll get huge bubbles, burnt tasting milk, and NO micro-bubbles (loud screeching sound).
 - With the tip slightly below the surface, create in a “vortex” of swirling milk. Find the sweet spot.

At the American Barista and Coffee School latte art class, they only break the surface for the “ch ch ch” sound once or twice before burying the tip and beginning the “swirl” or texturing part. For a cappuccino that requires more volume, you would do two or three “ch ch ch” surface breaks.

3. Minimal stretch: your finish volume should be only about 10-15% over what you start with for a latte, about 30% for cappuccino. Find the sweet spot, create as much foam as you need, then sink the wand tip and continue whirling the milk in the vortex. The exception to this is when making cappuccinos and need to froth a little more aggressively.
 - Hold your hand against the side of the pitcher. When the pitcher reaches body temperature (watch the thermometer and bury when you approach 100°), bury the wand below the surface. Place it against the side of the pitcher and tip the pitcher to start the milk swirling in a “whirlpool” inside the pitcher. This spinning whips the milk into the super dense micro-bubbles, the texture that creates such a smooth feel in the mouth and is necessary for latte art.

4. Finish: Heat to 155°. The temperature will continue up to 160°, the ideal temperature is between 155° and 160°. Over that, you curdle the proteins, introduce a burnt or rancid taste and have cooked all the “sweetness” out of the milk. Less than that creates a “chalky” tasting milk. There is a sound that goes with this temperature, listen for it. You can hear milk reach 150° to 155, tune your ear to it but that can be deceiving. Trust your thermometer.



We are looking for “micro” ultra-fine bubbles: they enrich the flavor, carry the espresso flavor better, and have a wonderful texture while bringing out the sweetness in the milk.

Have the espresso shots ready about the time the milk is done. I prefer NOT to have shots sit and wait. The longer they sit, the more bitter they become.

Smack the pitcher on the counter a couple times to eliminate big bubbles and swirl to incorporate milk and foam.

Latte Art

Begin pouring the milk into the espresso. Slowly! As if to sneak the milk underneath the crema. Pour from about 6 inches above the cup. When the cup is about 1/2 full, bring the pitcher close to the surface in the cup, give the milk/foam mixture a little push to see a white dot appear below the surface then move the pitcher from side to side from your elbow. Practice! Even if you aren't pouring latte art for a while, you're making the best-foamed milk most people have ever tasted! Viva Barista!!!

“There is one unspoken truth about quality latte art: it indicates the barista has an underlying passion for exceptional coffee.”

-Latte Art – All the Pieces of the Puzzle, www.coffeegeek.com.

Resources

A DVD on: “Advanced Barista Training: Extreme Pours” from Bellissimo, inc. and the America Barista and Coffee School. Their phone number is 800-655-3955 or their web site: www.espresso101.com.

Coffee Geek is a website that is a wonderful source of information on everything from a milk frothing guide to specific questions about latte art. Access them via: www.coffeegeek.com

Check out:

BaristaExchange.com

Home-Barista.com

SweetMarias.com

WholeLatteLove.com

Espresso101.com

BaristaMagazine.com

worldbaristachampionship.com



Latte Art made on my home machine

There are a ton of video's available on YouTube, search for latte art, milk frothing, etc. and you'll find helpful resources.

