

b espresso bar Taps into the East Side's Demand for a Cup of Good Italian Java

By Yvan Marston

Before Bruno Colozza opened his espresso bar last February, he'd spent the last 20 years as a furniture manufacturer and most of his life loving the simple pleasure of a good espresso.

"It's the purest form of extracting flavour from the coffee bean," says the restaurateur from his European-inspired coffee bar at 111 Queen Street East.

Research Trip

Built and modeled after the espresso bars he spent two weeks researching in Venice, Trieste and Rome ("I took a lot of pictures," he says), Colozza's space mixes contemporary fixtures with old architecture, a style that is typical of his Italian counterparts.

B Espresso's setting in the Queen Richmond Centre, the refurbished Robertson chocolate factory from the late 1800s, helps to replicate this old-world experience. A plasma screen runs classic films like *Casablanca* and *The Godfather* while a blend of contemporary and classical Italian music drifts into the brick and beam space.



Dressed in a palette of red, dark brown, and stainless steel, b espresso bar is as clean and modern a space as it is warm and inviting.

Espresso Essentials

But the warm and inviting part, insists Colozza, stems from the quality of the coffee, the food and the staff.

His espresso is brewed from Illy beans ("We think it's the best coffee in the world," he says.), and staff are given a quality control manual detailing the essentials of brewing the perfect espresso.

"There are seven important variables when you're making an espresso," explains Colozza, "and if you're off on just one of those, you'll get a less-than-perfect cup."

Following in the authentic Italian espresso bar tradition, b espresso bar makes its own pizzas from scratch, features mouth-watering paninis like a Catullo Panini (grilled chicken, asparagus and fontina cheese) and a popular Prosciutto Panini; and bakes its own croissants and muffins every morning.



Giving Pause

With seating for 30 and room for eight at the bar, Colozza sees a wide variety of clientele. Some, he says, just stop in to pick up a quick bite while others conduct meetings there.

"Some even stick around to watch part of a movie," he says, explaining that even when someone's just dropping in to pick up a coffee, b espresso bar still gives them pause.

"Whether it's talking about the food, taking in new art work we have on display, watching a movie that's playing or browsing one of our books, this is a place where someone can really take a true break from their day," says Colozza. ■

