

When in Rome

By: Cathi Bond

It began with a simple idea. Bruno Colozza had been working in the manufacturing business, but what he really wanted to do was bring an authentic, Italian espresso bar to Toronto. “I love the look of the espresso bars in the northern Italian cities. They’re sleek and modern in design, but they’re constructed within centuries-old architecture.”

Colozza found the perfect location to repeat this aesthetic, in the old Robertson chocolate factory on Queen Street East. Constructed in the 1800’s the building’s deeply worn wooden floors, exposed beams and aged brick were the perfect fit for the cool chic of Cecconi Simone Interior Design. “Anna (Simone) was ideal to work with. We both come from Italian backgrounds and she was familiar with the culture of the country and most importantly – the culture of coffee.”

Simone chose primary red and espresso bean for the colour scheme. A partially dropped ceiling warms the establishment, while tabletops are finished in riverbed pebbles, adding a soothing natural element. “I want people to feel calm when they come here,” Colozza remarks. “You can get a jolt of caffeine anywhere, but at b, whether you’re here for five minutes or two hours, I want you to truly escape the North American bustle.”

Indeed. At b you seem to simply drop out of Canada and into the middle of Milan. Boisterous staff prepare frothy drinks, while glasses and cutlery clang and bang. Italian music burbles in the background. The evocative aroma of Illy coffee wafts out of the espresso machine, which is expertly worked by Claudia Corti – a genuine Italian barista. Corti is training the staff on the centuries old secrets of making a perfect espresso – a respected work of art in Italy. The food is also fashioned on the European model. Nothing is brought in. All the meals and desserts are made from scratch by b’s own chef. Fresh cream is squeezed into every cannoli. Biscottis are hand dipped in chocolate.

B espresso bar is almost too good to be true. And Colozza hopes to open more. “I think Toronto could handle six or seven baby bs,” he muses. We think he’s right. Viva la b!