

CAFFE — COFFEEHOUSE — CAFE

Discovering Espresso Cafes

Judith Vasos

There was a time when North Beach was the only source of espresso for San Franciscans and visitors to this fair city. Times have changed and since 1973 more than fifteen cafes serving this strong, tasty brew have opened in neighborhoods throughout the city.

The machine which makes these espresso coffee drinks was invented in Italy and brought to San Francisco by the Italians who settled in North Beach. The oral historians of espresso and a lively cafe life are still found in North Beach. Giaufanco Giotta opened Caffe Trieste in 1956 and proudly claims, "Although Toscas' Bar opened in 1919 with an espresso machine, they made liquor drinks with espresso. The Trieste began cafe life and coffee drinks as we know them today."

Thomas Cara, proprietor of Cara Imports in North Beach is the man to

ly, engaging owners, Gianni Rappeto and his son Luciano have enthusiastically shared their knowledge of espresso with many interested visitors.

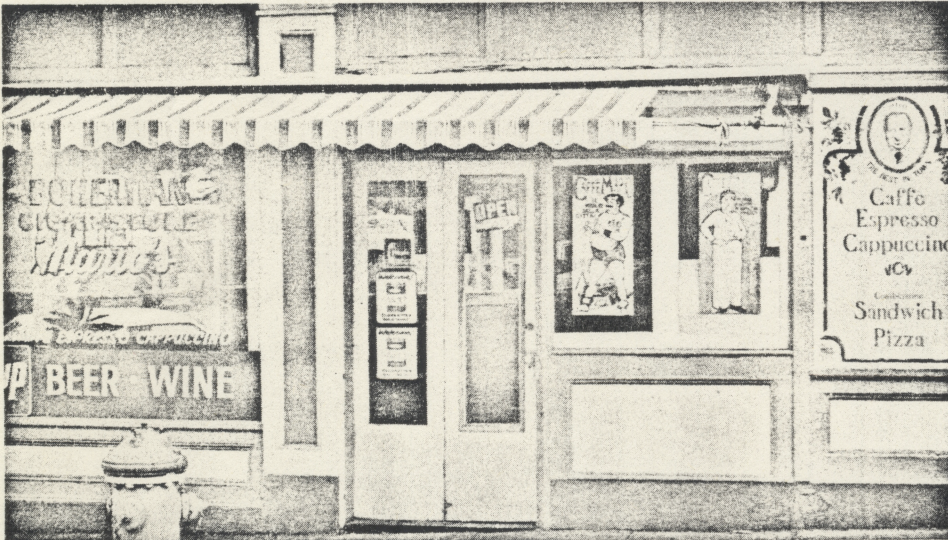
When the "Beatniks", who had populated North Beach during the 50's moved to other neighborhoods, they carried the tradition of espresso with them. By the early 60's coffeehouses began appearing in San Francisco's neighborhoods. They were funky little places where people could linger over a cup of coffee for hours; places where you could discuss art, politics, hear live music and meet old and new friends.

The Blue Unicorn was representative of such coffeehouses in the Haight/Ashbury. It opened in '62 when the Haight was becoming the center of social revolutionary activity. Others followed suit in neighborhoods throughout the city, with the Family Farmacy opening at 6th Avenue and Clement in the Inner Richmond and the Full Moon at 18th Street and Eureka in Castro Valley. There were other coffeehouses that opened during this time, but many did not have espresso machines and served only a fancy blend of house coffee.

The Blue Unicorn, Family Farmacy and the Full Moon are closed now but other coffeehouses opened in the neighborhoods in the early '70's. Curtiss Chan conceived the idea for the Meat Market Coffee-House in Noe Valley to provide a gathering place for people and because "there was no place in the neighborhood to find espresso". It opened in 1972 when Noe Valley was a quiet, mostly residential city neighborhood, with a few merchants on the 24th Street that is now lined with restaurants, bars, gift shops, and bookstores.

The Meat Market has the distinctive honor of having the first espresso machine south of Market, and it is rumored to have the largest and most intriguing bulletin board in the entire city.

The Marigold Coffeehouse opened soon after Curtiss, becoming the first



photos by Susan Conley

talk to about espresso machines. Importing the machines from Italy since World War II, he has had time to observe the growing popularity of espresso. He remembers a time when people thought the taste of espresso was "strong and deadly" but he's now busier than ever keeping up with orders for cafes and homes.

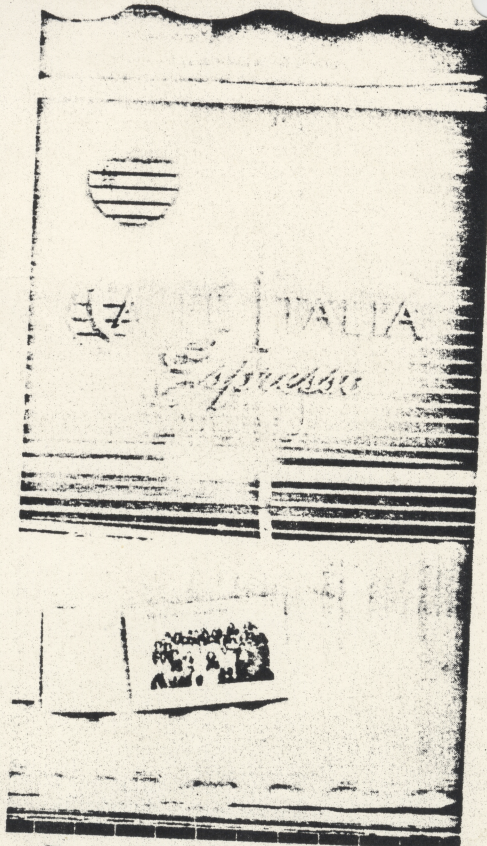
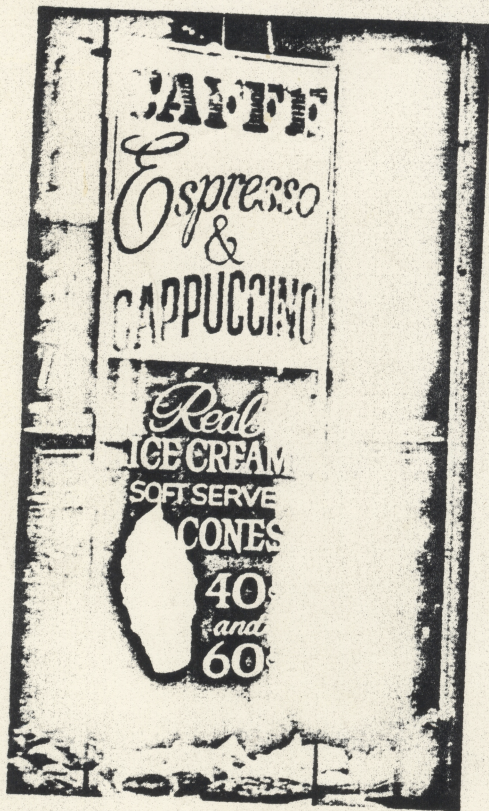
The famous Graffeo Coffee Roasting Company has been in North Beach since 1935 roasting and distributing the Italian-style coffee used in espresso machines. The friend-

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and now the oldest coffeehouse serving espresso far out in the Inner Sunset. The Owl and Monkey joined them across the street at 9th Avenue and Irving, helping to turn this area, once described as a "cultural desert" into a lively, friendly neighborhood.

Espresso activity is now centered around "cafes" in the neighborhoods. Replacing the term coffeehouse, the more sophisticated French word, cafe, describes a clean, well-lighted, comfortable, atmospheric establishment serving espresso coffee drinks, light meals, delightful sandwiches, pastries, wine and beer. The Italian word is *caffè* and is used in North Beach to describe a similar establishment.

Like a coffeehouse, these cafes provide a spot to play out a range of human activities from sitting quietly alone to reading, writing, listening to music, to having a spirited conversation with friends or acquaintances. They can be a haven from the hectic world outside or a place to seek a connection with it. They can be an occasional inexpensive meal or a familiar, friendly, daily stop. Each cafe develops its own personality and is as unique as the neighborhood and personalities it entertains.



An example of an espresso cafe which opened recently in the neighborhoods is Cafe Denise. This cafe opened on January 1, 1980 at 3214 16th Street near Guerrero. The owner, Denise D'Anne lives in this Inner Mission neighborhood and was encouraged to open the cafe by many of her friends who felt a cafe would be wonderful for this changing neighborhood. Victorians are being painted here, rents rising and more and more specialty shops are opening. Denise is a dedicated, committed lady who is working hard with community groups whose goal is to further the upgrading of this neighborhood without losing the people who live in it.

She feels cafes can provide a focal point for the neighborhood; a place where people can meet and talk. Denise attributes the birth of so many cafes in the neighborhoods to a "clearer identification with neighborhood issues and an increase in community groups."

Her cafe is open every day at 11 a.m. and serves quiche, soups, salads, sandwiches and espresso coffee drinks until midnight. Denise was not considering an espresso machine for the cafe until

her friends told her it would be necessary for the success of the cafe. She said they felt, "people are more sophisticated about coffee and they want espresso and the kind of continental atmosphere the espresso machine seems to create". The machine was installed and the walls painted white with emerald green to accent which gives it a very classy look. Paintings and drawings, being sold by neighborhood artists, decorate the walls. Windows front the cafe providing it with lots of light and endless opportunities to observe street and sidewalk life.

Denise is very friendly and outgoing in the cafe and it has developed a warm, comfortable atmosphere in the short time it has been open. Denise knows changes will be needed in the future and she is listening to people for suggestions so that the cafe can grow with its neighborhood.

Cafe Denise is just one of the many espresso cafes now opened in San Francisco. As one espresso devotee said recently, "espresso is being mainstreamed in our wonderful city and it's everywhere. Of course, San Francisco would be the city to do it."