

Miscela d'Oro, Sicilian Artisan Espresso

By Joan Nielsen

Report - from the fields

OLD WORLD ARTISAN COFFEE:

Introducing an old world artisan coffee product into the 21st Century cannot be an easy task. The myriad styles of American espresso have confused the American palate to a degree that, when confronted with traditional Italian espresso, the first time sipper may be mystified by the experience. WHAT? This drink is smooth, flavorful, and aromatic (as opposed to sharp, angular and too often bitter). This is espresso?! Yes, Virginia, this is Miscela d'Oro espresso, "blend of gold." But the road to American acceptance is still bumpy for this small artisan company, and so here's their story... and their challenge.

The Urbano family business began operating in 1946 in Messina, Sicily, where the company's founders, Umberto and Emanuela, began roasting small amounts of meticulously chosen coffee for their local market. By the 70's, the next generation, Francesco Urbano, focused the company's strategic interest on markets across Italy and newer distribution segments: specialty stores and supermarkets. In the 1980's they expanded with automated storage, roasting and packing systems. At the end of the 90's, with the arrival of the third generation, a commercial strategy evolved, in order to serve foreign markets. Now under Umberto Urbano, the company image was completely restyled, the logo changed and the packaging redesigned. In 2000, the Urbano family opened a new plant, equipped with state-of-the-art technology and improved storage, roasting and packing capacities. Over the past 60 years, they have evolved from a small workshop to a modern facility, but the typical characteristics of a family-run, artisan business are still in place.



THE THIRD GENERATION SPEAKS:

Umberto Urbano tells us, "My father – who still roasts every day in our factory – has the soul of an artist. And he has passed this to me. We feel responsible for protecting the beauty of the product: how it is made and handled and packaged.

I see success in any market as coming from three main factors. First, is the espresso good enough to convince someone to pick it up? When we pull a shot for anyone who's serious about espresso, the coffee sells itself. We have a very strong track record of quietly turning chefs and cafés onto Miscela d'Oro as a beautiful, artisan espresso product that's very authentically Italian, and a welcome alternative to industrial Italian espresso brands.

Second, there is, of course, the question of price. For an artisan Italian espresso, we're priced well, so I don't fear the question of price. We have been very careful to keep our pricing competitive – even in these times when the dollar-to-Euro exchange is putting pressure on us.

And third, there is the question of market reach. We know North Americans are becoming very sophisticated about what great espresso really means in terms

STATS:

Miscela d'Oro

North American Sales:

8939 South Sepulveda Blvd., Suite 110-721

Los Angeles, CA 90045

(310) 670-0576

www.misceladoro.com

Umberto Urbano, Messina, Italy
Bruno Montesano, US Director of Sales

of flavor profile and consistency. In 2007 we hired a sales team focused on selling outside the New York area, and we are just beginning to talk to people in other key markets – Vancouver, Chicago, Las Vegas, Los Angeles. And we now have the team, the infrastructure, in place to uphold Miscela d'Oro's commitment to quality in sales and customer service."

NEW WORLD ART:

"Quality, elegance, simplicity" is Miscela d'Oro's motto, and it was in high evidence at the SCAA 2008 Convention in Minneapolis. Their booth was centered in the middle of giant boards of "coffee art" photographs, hung from high metal scaffolding, swinging slightly in the indoor breeze of the convention center. This exhibition, called "Facce e Fiori" (faces and flowers) caused a minor sensation, a buzz of interest among the usual displays. Was this about "art" or "coffee?" It was both!

In 2006, the company decided that the time had come to radically change its image, entrusting this change to a master of creativity, Oliviero Toscani. An international designer most well known for his United Colors of Benetton ads, Toscani was hired to design a 60th anniversary image for Miscela d'Oro. And his wild "bean art" marked their entrance into the American market with a creative explosion! He captured the very essence of their brand – a modern company with an artisanal mentality – working grounds, beans, and pods of coffee into fanciful and luminescent designs.

THE COFFEES:

As apparent in the strongly flavored foods of Sicily (think Grilled Swordfish with Raisins and Olives), the espresso coffees of Miscela d'Oro are equally complex and rich. Their velvety Grand'Aroma (a predominance of premium Arabica from Central/South America and selected Robusta coffees from Asia) is aromatic, floral, delicate, and fragrant, with a mildly acidic, superb aftertaste. The Gran Crema (a blend of coffees from Central/South America and selected Robusta from Asia and Africa) has an intense flavor and a thick velvety crema. The most popular Gusto Classico (a balanced Arabica and Robusta blend from South America and Africa) is a traditional Italian blend with a strong body, a thick crema, and a strong, chocolaty, pleasant, and lingering aftertaste. Surprisingly, their Espresso Decaffeinato (another well-balanced and calibrated blend) is a dead ringer for its caffeinated cousins. All of these espressos are available in whole bean, ground, pods, single and double servings and more.

FIELD NOTES:

From Umberto's mouth... "Many people in North America are doing very interesting work creating new personalities and flavors in the espresso category. But I can't be a micro-roaster from Seattle or Mr. Peet from Berkeley. I am what I am: an artisan from Sicily who's bringing a very unusual and authentic flavor from the birthplace of espresso – Italy. My dream for North America is to bring people into the Miscela d'Oro family who understand this principal, who care passionately about authentic espresso and who get excited about discovering this special Sicilian espresso that surprises them with its quality, its flavor and its personality." Bravo, Miscela d'Oro! *CT*