

Celebrity roaster

The “finest benchtop coffee roaster in the world” is a Kiwi invention, of course.

STORY SHARON STEPHENSON

EVER SINCE A goat herder in ninth-century Ethiopia noticed that his animals leapt around energetically after nibbling on coffee plants, humans have added ground coffee beans to hot water and called it a good way to start the day. But while different coffee grinding and brewing methods have come and gone, the way coffee beans are roasted has stayed much the same.

“Coffee enthusiasts who wanted to control the flavour of their coffee usually roasted coffee beans in a frying pan on the stove or in a popcorn maker,” says John Robson, CEO of Dunedin’s Kaffelologic Ltd. “But both methods provided little control over the process and often produced mixed results. Sometimes the beans would burn, which was an expensive waste, but it was also messy and inconsistent.”

In 2014, software engineer and coffee lover Chris Hilder decided there had to be a better way. With a \$20 popcorn maker found online, he started experimenting with ways to control the amount of heat and air entering the appliance, which allowed him to manage the roasting process to ensure a consistent result.

Having “wrapped a bit of hardware around his software”, the Nano 7 was born. This is the Kaffelologic fully automated bench-top roaster, which is compact enough to sit on a kitchen counter but powerful enough to turn out small batches of roasted coffee beans in 12 minutes. “Home coffee drinkers select the flavour profile and roast level they want, hit the start button and it’s done,” says Robson, who first heard about Hilder’s invention in 2018. At the time, Robson was importing large-scale coffee roasters and grinders into New Zealand but was looking for a more cost-effective compact roaster for home use. “Ironically, I’d been searching the world for this kind of product and it had been developed right under my nose.”

He joined the company and after a couple of successful crowd-sourcing campaigns, the first units rolled off the production line in 2019. They found early success with coffee lovers in Australia, before expanding into Europe, Asia and the US.



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It helped that the winner of the 2021 World Barista Championships, Swiss barista Matt Winton, won the title using coffee roasted with a Nano 7. “We didn’t even know he was using our product, but it bought us huge recognition globally. Last year around 20 baristas in the World Barista Championships used Kaffelologic, cementing us as the preferred roaster among coffee professionals.”

Robson says Nano 7s can be found from Sweden to Guatemala, with around 90 percent of the units sold to the domestic market and the rest to coffee growers, cafes and baristas who use theirs as sample roasters to experiment with small batch roast styles and various beans.

Around 20 staff produce the sleek black roasters in central Dunedin. “We use a mix of imported and local suppliers but it’s one of our company’s philosophies to do as much as we can locally. That includes using a local company for our metal panel work



Chris Hilder (left) and John Robson.

and another that assists with the design and manufacture of our circuit boards.”

With a target of 10,000 machines sold this year, the company is eyeing the Japanese and South Korean markets and plans to expand to include a high-tech version, a more affordable option and one for the cafe market.

“Ultimately our goal is to bring convenient coffee roasting into anyone’s home in much the same way as Nespresso has bought espresso coffee into people’s homes. We want to make roasting easy and economical and allow coffee lovers to try amazing beans from, say, Burundi or Uganda, which they would never see on a supermarket shelf.”

kaffelologic.com