

# Best Coffee Roasters in the US for Your Morning Cup

 [thrillist.com/drink/nation/the-21-best-coffee-roasters-in-the-country](http://thrillist.com/drink/nation/the-21-best-coffee-roasters-in-the-country)

Dan Gentile

12/8/2017



For some people the best cup of coffee in America is whatever's currently in their hand, but then there are those for whom coffee is less of an alarm clock and more of a poetic experience. The type of dorks that measure out their lives in coffee spoons, not in the depressed 20th century poet type of way, but rather know the beans at every coffee shop in their town like some Espresso Rain Man.

Naturally we also bow down in praise to a perfect cup of gritty diner coffee, but you won't find Dunkin' anywhere on this list (even though we do love them). These 21 companies are staffed by Type A coffee geeks who take an insane amount of care in every step of the process, from visiting the farms that grow the coffee and building relationships with the farmers to developing unique roast profiles that bring out each unique bean's individual snowflake flavor qualities.

Recommended Video

Bottoms Up

Finally, a Recipe That Lets You Drink Beer and Still Be "Healthy"

[Watch More](#)

To choose the very best, we polled a group of these types of industry professionals, ranging from baristas to roasters to coffee writers, then interviewed and sampled the roasters we hadn't already tried. Seriously, if you need some coffee, we've got about 20 bags in our kitchen.

So read on to learn more about the companies roasting the very best beans in the business, and if you're curious whether those honeysuckle tasting notes ring true, most all of these beans are available to order online, but no, they don't offer K-Cups.

□ Blue Bottle Coffee

## Blue Bottle

---

### SF

---

**The bean:** Oakland Lights, a fruity and spicy holiday blend of a wet processed Sumatra and natural Ethiopian

In the 15 or so years since Blue Bottle launched in an alley that they described as smelling like a bathroom ([more fun facts here!](#)) they've grown into the Apple Store of coffee shops. Locations span from their native Bay Area to New York and even Tokyo, a mere bullet train from Kyoto where they discovered a special style of cold brew that's become one of their signatures. Their beans are only available in their retail shops, but there's a good chance one will soon arrive on a corner near you thanks to a recent investment of \$70 million. And they're even reaching out to those who lack the patience to brew fancy coffee with pre-ground beans that uses a proprietary process to maintain an unparalleled freshness.

□ Camber

## Camber

---

### Bellingham, WA

---

**The bean:** Honduras Migdoneo Enamorado, grown in the highlands around Lake Yojoa with a slower development time resulting in flavors of cinnamon, mandarin orange, and honey

Q Graders are the sommeliers of the coffee world, trained to detect the most imperceptible defects and differences in beans. Camber's was founded by three such gold star coffee dorks in 2015 and have since made their way into a handful of the [best coffee shops in America](#) like G&B and Go Get Em Tiger in LA. From their Flagship in Bellingham, Washington (halfway between Seattle and Vancouver) they roast coffees available by the bag or in box sets showcasing the diversity of specific growing regions, like their Colombia La Bohemia box set, which features two Gesha's (coffee's most fetishized varietal) and a third bean that tastes of rose, merlot, and orange.

□ Coava Coffee Roasters

# Coava

---

## Portland

---

**The bean:** Ethiopian Kilenso with notes of lavender and grape jam

When it comes to boutique roasters and coffee shops, it's hard to beat Portland. One of the very best is Coava, who began wholesaling out of the owner's garage in 2008 and have since spread their distribution network across the country. Like everyone on this list, these guys take sourcing seriously, picking each single-lot coffee only after trying beans from roughly 500 other neighboring farms. That commitment to excellence continues with next-level roasting tech like a sorting table that lets them weed out any defects that have made it past the processing stations. And to give the public a better window into their meticulous methods, they've recently opened a 10k sqft roasting facility that features public tastes and a training lab.

□ Counter Culture

## Counter Culture

---

### Durham, NC

---

**The bean:** Iridescent, a winter blend that tastes like dark chocolate and benefits climate change adaptations for farmers

These days the biggest independent coffee roasters are rolling in investment dollars, but Counter Culture has stuck to their guns as a wholesale only company, eschewing storefronts in favor of fueling the espresso machines of discerning shops across the country. They've been certified organic since 2002 (on the first day it was legally possible!) and keep that conscious mentality alive through programs like the Coalition for Coffee Communities, that helps address food security dangers in coffee growing communities, and a yearly transparency report that shows the price they paid farmers for all of their coffees. Plus they take coffee flavors so seriously that they designed their own coffee flavor wheel, a matrix explaining the different types of fruit, floral, and spice notes found in their coffees.

related

---

[The 20 Most Popular K-Cups, Ranked](#)

□



## Four Barrel

---

### SF

---

**The bean:** Friendo Blendo, a mix of Colombia, Ethiopian, and Guatemala beans that they describe as having “citrus flavors swan dive into fresh berry full forward fold, which jumps or walks back into down dog, then ascends into a toffee sweetness sun salutation. Swan dive.”

Four Barrel's signature mug is inscribed with a cursive “Fuck it”, which succinctly sums up the SF-based roaster (in a good way!). Life's too short to drink bad coffee, a philosophy that translates to person-to-person direct trade relationships with roasters and a golden rule-like dedication to their employees. Their three Bay Area coffee shops stick to that person-focused mentality by cutting out wi-fi and classes ranging from home brewing to cupping ensure that their clientele knows how best to enjoy their home (with some delicious wi-fi).

□ [George Howell Coffee Company](#)

## George Howell Coffee

---

### Acton, MA

---

**The bean:** check on this closer to publication date, the beans change too regularly

Figures in the coffee industry don't come more highly regarded than George Howell. He scored a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Specialty Coffee Association of America... in 1996, two years after he sold his first coffee company to a little chain of shops called Starbucks. Fast forward twenty odd years and he's still traveling to far-flung parts of the globe in search of the best coffees in existence, as well as bringing new innovations into the coffee world, such as a chilling machine that allows their cafes to cool a glass of just-brewed hot coffee to 38 degrees in just a minute, preserving the coffee characteristics without sacrificing flavor.

□ Heart Roasters

## Heart Roasters

---

### Portland

---

**The bean:** Ethiopian Halo, with notes of jasmine, gooseberry, and butterscotch

Ever since Starbucks doubled down on dark roasts, the specialty coffee industry has swung towards the light side in order to better showcase the individual flavors of each bean. Heart does offer some beans with the chocolatey flavors traditionally associated with darker coffees, but they're beloved by coffee geeks for their lighter touch. It also helps their reps that their three Portland shops ooze Scandinavian chic, but also showcase their methods by putting a fully functioning sexy black Probat roaster front and center in their flagship shop.

□ [Intelligentsia](#)

## Intelligentsia

---

### Chicago

---

**The bean:** Black Cat Classic Espresso, with notes of dark chocolate, ripe cherry, and brown sugar

Intelligentsia paved the way for the type of intense bean sourcing that characterizes so many of today's roasters, but as the Chicago-born company has expanded to a tri-coastal operation and recently sold a stake to Peet's, it's still managed to maintain that level of Indiana Jones-style coffee hunting that first endeared it to drinkers in its original location on Broadway Ave in Chicago. Their coffee is so consistently great that it's nearly become the Kleenex of fancy coffee in their adopted home of Los Angeles, with see-and-be-seen cafes in hotspots like Silver Lake and Venice.

related

---

[The definitive top 10 coffee-growing countries in the world, ranked by experts](#)

□



La Colombe Coffee Roasters

## La Colombe

---

### Philadelphia

---

**The bean:** Panama Auromar Geisha, with notes of blackberry, white wine, and jasmine

Philadelphia-based roaster La Colombe is prone to blow up thanks to a \$28 million dollar investment and that means expansion far beyond their flagship coffee wonderland in

Fishtown. The latest moves include two more Los Angeles cafes, as well as a roastery and cupping facility in the upcoming LA neighborhood of Frogtown that'll give them a foothold in the west coast to ensure their beans are always the freshest. But it's not just aggressive expansion that sets them apart within the booming indie coffee sector, it's innovative products like bottled and draft lattes, including seasonals that might make coffee snobs roll over in their grave, like a (gasp!) peppermint mocha.

□ Madcap Coffee

## Madcap

---

### Grand Rapids, MI

---

**The bean:** Guatemala Hunapu, grown in volcanic soil with notes of plum, chocolate, cream, and tangerine

Knockout beans mixed with a flair for creative coffee concoctions has earned Madcap a permanent place in the conversation of best roasters around. They've maintained relationships with some of their farmers since their first year in business (2008!), keeping in such close contact that their sourcers spend a third of the year outside of the US. Plus, they invite their fans along for the ride via video blog posts featuring farms like Finca de Dios in Guatemala.

□ Manzanita Roasting Company

## Manzanita Roasting

---

### San Diego

---

**The bean:** Kenya Akusi AB, black currant, intense, creamy

Coffee geeks love to quote statistics that coffee has more flavor compounds than wine, but rarely does that power fact sway a sommelier to trade their grapes for beans. Manzanita is one such company where a somm jumped ship and dove into the coffee world, partnering with his wife (another wine professional) to start Manzanita in North County San Diego. They take a serious approach to sourcing, looking beyond organic certifications in favor of farms who're doing good but can't afford the costly inspections. They're also one of the most environmentally friendly companies on the list thanks to a special made in California roasting machine that cuts greenhouse gas emissions by 80%.

## Merit Coffee

---

## San Antonio

---

**The bean:** Karamandi, notes of white grape, rose, and green apple

In 2009 the owners of Merit brought obsessively good coffee to San Antonio under the banner of Local, which quickly expanded to six shops across the city. Naturally the next step was to start traveling the world in search of the finest beans to bring back to their renovated South San Antonio warehouse, where they roast beans like the Karamandi, a Kenyan bean from the Baragwi Cooperative in Kirinyaga that tastes of white grape, rose, and green apple.

□ [ONYX Coffee Lab](#)

---

## Onyx

---

### Springdale, AR

---

**The bean:** Framily, a “friendly” holiday Ethiopian with notes of dark chocolate, early grey, berries, and sweet cream

Every coffee company on this list prizes themselves on their transparency, but few lay out their process quite like Onyx. On their website the Arkansas-based roastery and cafe explains their whole process, from the models of roaster they use (rebuilt Diedrich IR-12 and IR40s) to their cupping schedule, each coffee is tasted at 2, 5, and 10 days to learn how it ages. They're also crystal clear about their blended coffee varieties, a mix of the same high quality beans featured as single origin coffees. The dedication to quality continues down the line to their 59 baristas across three stores in Arkansas.

related

---

[19 Things You Didn't Know About Coffee](#)

□



Meredith Singer

---

## Revelator

---

### Birmingham, AL

---

**The bean:** Rwanada Gatere, with notes of stone fruit, hibiscus, and orange marmelade

As independent coffee companies from both coasts become monolithic enterprises, the South has remained relatively quiet... except for Revelator. Southern hospitality drives their approach, as does complimenting their coffees with locally-inspired food menus at each of their eight locations across six states.

## Royal Mile Coffee

---

### Haddon Township, NJ

---

**The bean:** Nicaraguan Mama Mina light roast with flavors of caramel and nutty brown sugar

After drinking a revelatory cup of cold brew from iconic Texas roaster Cuvee, the founder of Royal Mile's life changed forever. The experience inspired him to buy a manual roaster and experiment with one pound batches until he was confident enough to unveil his beans to the public. Coffee connoisseurs quickly took note, spreading the gospel of coffees like a Tanzanian Peaberry microlot and Nicaraguan beans sourced through a close relationship with the farmer's son. Soon enough Whole Foods hopped on the bandwagon, selling Royal Mile in stores across Pennsylvania and New Jersey, where the founder has logged over 1000 hours giving out samples.

□ Ruby Coffee Roasters

## Ruby Coffee Roasters

---

### Nelsonville, WI

---

**The bean:** Costa Rica Cerro La Cruz espresso, tasting notes of apricot jam, caramel, chocolate cake, cream

The best that most small towns can offer in terms of coffee is a fresh pot of diner drip, but Nelsonville, WI isn't most small towns. The 200-person population dot on the map is within driving distance of not only close to a heartland of farms and a trio of solid craft breweries (Central Waters, Kozy Yak, and O'so), but also boasts a world-class coffee company in Ruby, the roasting project of an Intelligentsia veteran that's made waves far beyond the local diner. The flavor profile skews towards sweet and juicy, with a focus on Kenyan, Ethiopian, and Colombian coffees, and beans come from a host of other Latin American producers with which Ruby's developed personal relationships that will bear brewable fruits for years to come. This year they're most excited about a Costa Rican farm that just began independently processing their own coffee this season after years of relying on a co-op.

□ Sey Coffee



# Sey Coffee

---

## Brooklyn

---

**The bean:** Guatemala Picho, dried on raised beds with highly drinkable apple flavors

Formerly known as Lofted, Sey Coffee recently rebranded with the launch of a Buswick cafe so sleek it earned a write-up in the New York Times. The company's approach to buying micro-lots, sometimes even the whole harvest of an individual farmer, has won the admiration of New York coffee aficionados as well as wholesale accounts as far south as Texas. Their approach is three-tiered, with a spectrum of beans ranging from “sweet and simple” to “round and loud” to “intricate and animate”, which ensures that customers know what to expect from their cup, even as the beans change on a monthly basis.

□ Stumptown Coffee Roasters

## Stumptown

---

### Portland

---

**Hair Bender:** the company's very first offering, a complex blend of Indonesian, Latin American, and African coffees

Like Intelligentsia, Stumptown recently joined the Peet's Coffee fold, but don't let that fool you. The quintessential coffee cool kids aren't selling out, but buying in, to allow for greater expansion of a brand that's become synonymous with stellar coffee. Look for them in the Ace Hotel in Chicago and their cold brew across the country at grocery stores. And although Stumptown is most typically associated with hip urban vibes, they're also aiming at the outdoorsman with a special camping coffee kit with a custom burner, drip brewer, and even a Stumptown bandana.

## Take Flight

---

### Los Angeles

---

**The bean:** Ethiopian Kochere, notes of cranberry, lime, currant

Combining coffee philosophy's from the founder's native Australia where they only have tastes for espresso, as well as a Nordic obsession with bright citrus coffees, and American ideas of accessibility, Take Flight refer to themselves as Gypsy Roasters. Mysterious labels aside, they rest their heads in LA, with pedigree from Intelligentsia and Handsome, as well

as New York's Toby's Estate. The current standout of their menu is the Kochere, with a classic bright and floral Yigacheffe flavor profile, sourced from family-owned farms in Southern Ethiopia.

related

---

## How I Quit Coffee in 7 Horrible Days

□



## Sweet Bloom Coffee Roasters

# Sweet Bloom

---

## Lakewood, CO

---

**The bean:** La Union from Narino, Colombia, with flavors of cola, mandarin, plum, and panela

Bloom is the term used for when water first hits coffee beans and creates an aromatic bubbling in the grounds. It's one of the most magical moments of the brewing process for people who find brewing processes magical, and also happens to serve as the namesake for Lakewood, CO's Sweet Bloom. The company's founder has won first or second place in nearly all of the coffee world's most important competitions and takes direct sourcing a step further than most by actually inviting farmers to visit his headquarters. Their roasts skew lighter than normal with an emphasis on sweetness (go figure) and floral aromatics, look for standout Colombian coffees available for the holidays.

□

## Verve Coffee Roasters

# Verve

---

## Santa Cruz

---

**The bean:** Streetlevel espresso, with notes of stone fruit, zesty citrus, and syrupy sweetness that makes it ideal for milk-based drinks

Co-founded by a guy who grew up with his hands in the soil farming pears and wine at his family farm in Northern California, it's no wonder that Verve has such a trained eye for coffee terrior. Founded in Santa Cruz, the brand now has cafes in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and

Japan, all featuring single origin coffees as well as a signature Streetlevel blend of two Guatemalan farms with some wild heirloom varieties mixed in for good measure.

*[Sign up here](#) for our daily Thrillist email and [subscribe here](#) for our YouTube channel to get your fix of the best in food/drink/fun.*

*[Dan Gentile](#) is a freelance writer based in Austin, TX. He drinks Kalita Wave in the morning, Japanese-styled iced coffee from a Chemex in the afternoon, and is searching for another pretentious coffee drink to enjoy after dark. Follow him to tweets and disco and barbecue at [@Dannosphere](#).*

*Our best stories, delivered daily*

*The best decision you'll make all day.*