

# HOW WE DID IT

The process was deliciously simple. Gather a panel of tasters who have experience in the coffee industry, hospitality, and the food scene around town. Have them descend on a neutral territory: the reputable confines of Le Cordon Bleu's coffee laboratory on lower Cuba Street. Next, decant all beans supplied by roasters in the Wellington region into numbered blind bags so that the tasters don't know which bean is which.

Then the tasting began, with each bean used to make exactly what's ordered in Wellington cafés: short blacks and the coffee king, double-shot flat whites. With all coffees made by champion barista Aymon McQuade in the same conditions on the same machine (using the finest Zorganic milk from Zany Zeus for all the flat whites), the variables were only in the beans.

The panel were given tasting sheets and asked to score each short black on grounds of taste balance, flavour and tactility, and each flat white on the basis of flavour. Each bean was deliberated over in a round-table discussion – so that an overall consensus score was given.

The short black was judged out of 30 – with 12 points available for taste balance, 12 points available for flavour, and 6 points available for its tactility. Considerations were based on whether the cup showed a harmonious balance of sweetness, acidity and bitterness, as well as a balanced body, roundness and smoothness within the espresso. The double flat white was scored out of 12, focusing on the flavour of the bean put through milk, and judging the harmonious balance of richness and sweetness brought out by the espresso with milk. Each category was based on a scale from 'unacceptable' to 'extraordinary' – and each taster had to place the bean into that continuum before finding a consensus with the other tasters. Therefore, each bean could achieve a total of 42 points.



The beans themselves were the first consideration. The only person to handle them from their numbered bags was McQuade, who reported that the overall quality was good – but that there were noticeable differences that came down to the freshness of the beans. “There were a few that I put through the machine that you could tell when they were pouring that they had been recently roasted. And there were coffees that were clearly well outside of that window that had been roasted some days ago.”

Generally speaking, the beans tasted by the panel held their own pretty well, with most achieving scores of either good or very good. Notably (and a pleasing sub-conclusion of this tasting), the roasters not based in central Wellington ranked squarely with those that are, meaning that Hutt Valley, Kapiti and Wairarapa coffee drinkers should have confidence in their local roasters.

The standard of flat whites was particularly high. While three beans shone above the others in the test, only two beans of the thirteen tasted were deemed to be of poorer standard. *FishHead* will not name either of these roasters, whose beans were both criticised for being over-roasted or too dark to be enjoyable, with milk unable to rescue the flavour. The tasting champions can now be announced:

## THE TOP THREE

**ACME – Espresso Blend**  
SCORE: 35 / 42

Tasting notes for the short black spoke of “fullness and complexity”, a clean finish and balance of sweetness to bitterness. Also praised were its cakey aroma, with a high acidic front that mellowed sweetly, and that it was not overly roasted. The flat white was well bodied, it had good strength, and its flavours shone beautifully.



**CELCIUS – Capital Blend**  
SCORE: 32 / 42

The panellists recognised the short black for being complex, fruity and tangy, but well balanced with a full flavour and caramel tones. The flat white was full and sweet, whilst retaining its balance.



**REVIVE – Orange Label Blend**  
SCORE: 31 / 42

The short black was congratulated for its almond notes, a sweet, nutty finish, and strength balanced by acidity. Tasting notes for the flat white found the milk heightened the good qualities of the short black, retained its balance and enjoyed a clean finish.

