

A Life Philosopher in Lohua: The Owner of Little Italy Café

Kelly Shen

Located in No. 145-1, Yong Ping road, Little Italy Café inside Lohua night market turns to be conspicuous because of its positional uniqueness as compared with other coffee shops on the street.



The store-owner Arnold Hong Yuan Lee, is a barista, which does not mean a bartender, but a professional highly skilled in making various sorts of coffee. Arnold has developed a philosophy of life in his coffee shop: for him, the night market is a reflection of true life. “Vendors are ceaselessly coming and going to prepare food and busy in selling things in order to earn a living for their own family. This is a true life, the reality and a great deed,” said Arnold. “And my coffee shop offers a temporary breathing space in reality.” For him to open a coffee shop is to fulfill his dream. Although the process is difficult and arduous and full of pain, there is unutterable happiness to spur him on.

Q: How did you find your career in running a coffee shop?

Arnold found his passion for coffee in New York, and, since then, maintained

his peace of mind through this interest in coffee. He used to be an art designer in advertisement. To seek inspiration, he once paced up and down anxiously in New York for almost half a year, but then he found tranquility and childlike innocence in a coffee shop. From this day onwards, he further lost his heart to coffee after taking the responsibility for a series of photographs of books about coffee. To his surprise, he, who only drank Uni-President Coffee Plaza at that time, found similarity between making coffee and taking photographs— that the operation process decides the results. Later, through his friends' guidance, self-study and a barista who used to make coffee for him, Arnold learned to perfect his skills in coffee-making. The zeal for coffee drove him to open his own coffee shop. At first, he ran a shop in Wu Xing Street in Taipei city, and then, as his mother retired from her work on miso soup inside Lohua night market, which is closer to home, he started to run Little Italy. So he has his own coffee shop inside Lohua night market.

Q: How did coffee have influence on you and what did you intend to do?

He was in deep thought and then said, “I used to be choleric and immature. The moment I was in New York to make a short film, I found that my film missed something, but however, I couldn't tell what it was. Until one day, when I sat in an outdoor coffee shop named Little Italy, I saw the people there drawing, talking and smiling with each other. It was the most simple and basic interaction with people that I lost while making films: natural interactions with respect, and in simplicity and innocence. So after I came back, I named my coffee shop ‘Little Italy Coffee’ because I learned respect there, which is great and meaningful to my life.”

A Space to be an observer, a passer-by and a participant in life.

“Previously I talked about many things about ‘me.’ We tend to do things and judge people from our own points of view, which can be quite subjective. Yet, it was the people at the Little Italy of New York that helped made the ‘me’ here achieve and



fulfill itself. Therefore, I hope to create a space for the customers to find their inner self and a space to reflect on the life they have. They could be an observer, a passer-by and a participant. The coffee shop inside the night market is the best

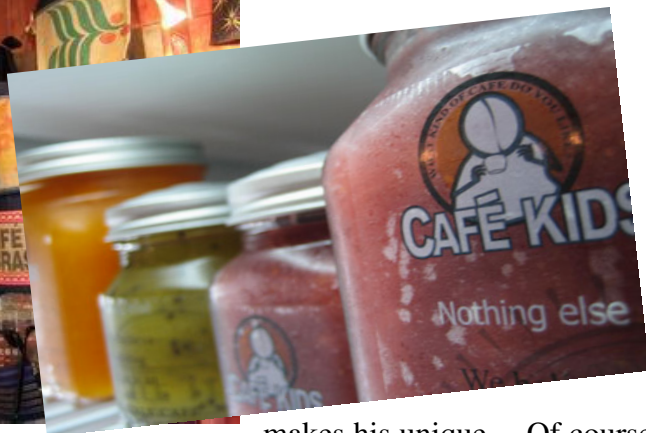
place for people to take a deep breath and to take these three roles.

Q: Does your coffee shop match the night market?

Arnold believes Little Italy Cafe located inside the night market has its own value. Although there are over hundreds of coffee shops in Taiwan, only his coffee is first made by a Baron Italian coffee pot and his coffee shop with handmade jam is



inside the night market. This



makes his unique. Of course, the competitiveness is inevitable. Being one of over one hundred drinks in the night market for the customers to select from, the flavor and uniqueness of his coffee decide his survivability. He can make diverse flavors for the customers. It's common to see people walking in and ordering a cup of coffee to go with Chicken buttocks. For Arnold, nothing is definitely good or bad; coffee gradually becomes a part of life for the people in the night market there. Even the vendor will sometimes order a cup of

coffee and take a rest there. Sometimes people will sit inside the coffee shop to see others bargaining with the vendor. As an observer, Arnold enjoys this kind of life as if he were in New York where people interacted with each other in a simple way.

Q: Does this mean that you need to give up what you've learned in art design in order to run the coffee shop?

“Definitely not,” he was chuckling over the question and replied. In the beginning, he found that the people who love drinking coffee have inexhaustible creative imagination. Therefore, he created a cartoon, Café Kid, as those people who are simple,



innocent, creative and imaginative.

Afterwards he cooperated with his sister who is engaged in handicrafts to create bags, notebooks, wallets made of brown gunny cloth. In fact, instead of giving up

what he learned,

he made good

use of his

artistic

sensibility in

decorating the

coffee shop, designing the store's logo and in

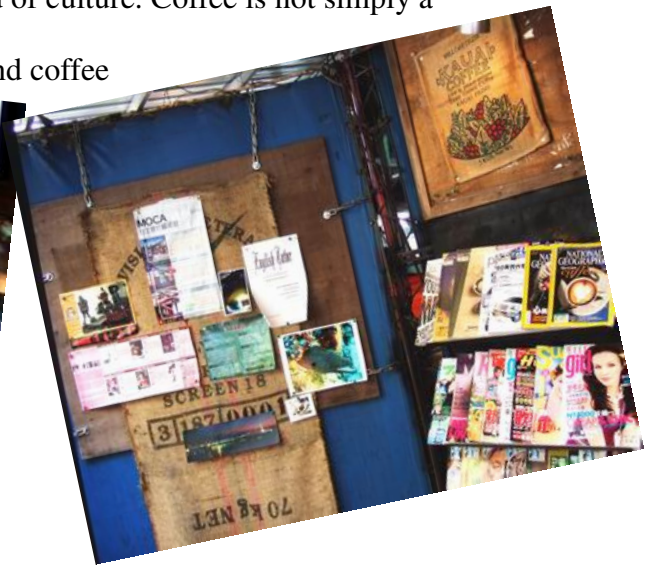
producing Latte art . “No matter what you do,



once you do it with your whole heart, you'll know where the goal is. And you are going to find the goal is not really far from you," he said with absolute faith.

In addition, Arnold takes care of every detail in his coffee shop, which, for him, together forms a culture. He said, "Everything in a coffee shop can influence the 'taste' of the coffee you have: the skills in making coffee, the way the shop is run, the atmosphere created through decoration, and even the other customers. "That's why I regard coffee and coffee shops as a kind of culture. Coffee is not simply a

drink and coffee



shops are not a place only for drinking," Hong Yuan Lee smiled. And then he pointed to his coffee shop and said, "People feel amazed that Little Italy Café is inside Lo Hua night market, but this is life. You sit here and meet with sorts of people. There is no distinguishing for me from the vendors. We are all participants in life. The coffee shop mixes with different cultures from Western custom to the night markets in Taiwan and from the Middle East to Taiwan. I identify with my work so I devote all my energies to making good coffee for customers. Granted that my coffee is not the most wonderful one, I am diligent and the customer is affected by my hard working."

On account of Arnold's personality, he easily makes friends with people from various walks of life no matter they are bosses, professors, students, designers, or vendors. "No matter whom you are and what your identity is, once you are in Little Italy Coffee, you can temporarily forget the vexation and worry; then completely put

in the world of coffee. That is ‘nature’ and everything is so natural,” said Arnold with a smile. For example, every time when the enterpriser came to Little Italy, he freely chatted with Arnold. He neither brought in the pressure and atmosphere in business nor had high attitude toward people. Another example is that a young friend advised him to go abroad to relieve the pressure when Arnold was dejected. The moment that Arnold heard what the young friend said, Arnold told him that he needs to earn a living for his family right away. Arnold thought the young friend is too young to really worry about living, but he took the young friend’s advice as well. Afterward they acquainted with each other and Arnold learned that the young friend is a haemophilia patient. That was the reason why the young friend wanted Arnold to live in the present and to seize the time and the chance instead of being hindered from trivial things. Arnold is thankful that he learned and derived benefit from the customers.

In early days, most people didn’t know what Latte is, but nowadays people who come to Little Italy can designate what kind of coffee they would like to drink. The development of coffee increases and people are accustomed to drinking coffee in their daily life. Coffee used to be a representative of western culture; however, it has already melted in Taiwanese life style—a night market. This means a night market creates the sparkle of different cultures.

All about Coffee

A Baron Italian coffee pot is a good tool to make coffee. It is simple for the manipulator to enjoy and realize the real skills in making coffee. The fire control and the air pressure are easy to handle. Owing to an ethereal and portable design, people can make coffee everywhere they like and taste their own coffee made by them without the drawbacks of an electric coffee mill. Even Latte art is easy to make with a Baron Italian coffee pot.

Generally speaking, most people misunderstand coffee. One is that people think coffee must be black. But actually after stirring, the color of coffee in a glass through the light is golden yellow. The other is the sour and the bitter of coffee. To be frank, some coffee beans are sour, and some bitter. There are different kinds of sour, like the sour of fruit and a lemon sour. Bitterness is necessary for coffee. Nevertheless, its original flavor from coffee beans can take on the depth of the flavor based on the properties of coffee beans during the roast.

But people seek for good coffee, but what is worthy of the name of “good coffee”? Is pure coffee so called good or coffee after commercial packing good? Arnold provides readers an answer as a food for thought: in fact, coffee is neither good nor bad; only people can be either good or bad. If the flavor fits you, the coffee is good for you because you do like this flavor. But this really depends on different individuals. Therefore, the flavor is adjusted through the depth of the flavor according to the customer’s needs.

About Little Italy Café

- Opening hour:

From Monday to Thursday at 17:00PM to 02:00AM

From Friday to Sunday at 14:00PM to 02:00AM

- Day- off:

Every Tuesday on the second and fourth week