



## DREAM BEANS

A passion for coffee is a way of life at  
Barrington Coffee Roasting Company

WRITTEN BY SUSANNA OPPER PHOTOGRAPHY BY KEVIN SPRAGUE

**B**ARTH ANDERSON REMOVES A SMALL SCOOP from the roaster and scrutinizes the two-dozen sample beans it contains before he returns the scoop to its nook. Just a few seconds later, he scoops more beans, does it again, this time tossing them into a dryer—a circular, horizontal open drum attached to the roaster. “They’re done,” he exclaims. With a flourish, he then opens the roaster door, and thousands of very hot coffee beans tumble out, landing in the dryer, where they crackle as a rotating arm encourages them to cool down quickly.

“These beans go from four hundred and sixty degrees to almost room temperature in a few minutes,” Anderson explains. “Roasting is a very precise process. Ten or fifteen seconds over-roasting and they’ll lose their endearing qualities—the more complex characteristics and flavors we bought these beans for in the first place.”

dream of opening a really good coffee place in Manhattan. “New York is known for bad coffee,” observes Rubenstein, sipping a cup of Barrington coffee at one of the thirteen round retro Formica tables at his Greenwich Village Joe location. “It’s such an amazing culinary city, but coffee was a joke. I want to change all that.”

So, as Rubenstein explains in a video clip that can be viewed on [www.barringtoncoffee.com](http://www.barringtoncoffee.com), he went on a quest for the perfect coffee roasting company. “I was set on finding a roaster in Seattle because that’s where the buzz is for great coffee,” he recalls. But his sister had another idea. An aspiring opera singer, she’d spent a summer at Tanglewood. “I found this place with the greatest coffee,” she told him, but couldn’t remember its name. Eventually, Rubenstein and Anderson met, and Barrington Coffee was selected for Joe. In 2004, the year it opened, Joe was named best coffee bar in New York by the

The thirteen minutes spent in the roaster have transformed these beans from dormant to active; their two-year-long journey from a farm in Brazil to the perfect cup of coffee is almost over. At five p.m. that day, the beans will be picked up by UPS, and by the next afternoon, they’ll be someone’s latte at Joe in Manhattan.

From 1993 to last December, Anderson and his partner, Gregg Charbonneau, roasted exceptional coffee in a tiny space hidden behind Bev’s Ice Cream (now SoCo Creamery) on South Main Street in Great Barrington, Massachusetts. But in December the roastery moved to a 5,250-square-foot custom building in the Quarry Hill Business Park on Route 102 in Lee, Massachusetts. The Barrington Coffee Roasting Company has come of age.

“You can’t make a coffee better by roasting it,” Anderson explains as he now loads the roaster with the next batch. “It’s only as good as it was grown and processed and transported to us. Our job is to roast it to order as carefully, consistently, and as appropriately as we can so that it gets to our customers as fresh as possible. It’s got to look great, but the visual is only the beginning. If it doesn’t taste amazing, then it doesn’t meet our standard.”

Barrington has high standards about customer relationships, too. Take Jonathan Rubenstein for example: a talent agent with a passion for coffee, he had a





*Village Voice* and *New York* magazine and hailed for serving the best coffee in the city by *Time Out New York*.

The Barrington Coffee Roasting Company's founders were a mere sixteen years old when the dream began. Anderson, who grew up in Worcester, Massachusetts, met Charbonneau, a native of Stockbridge, Massachusetts, at Simon's Rock in 1984. The two students shared a love of good coffee and smart gastronomy in an era preceding the restaurant explosion in Great Barrington.

"In those days, we used to joke around about opening a coffeehouse," Charbonneau recalls, sitting on a concrete block in their tiny office on South Main. (The concrete block is a sample for the new building, used as seating and also as a reminder of good things to come in the Lee facility.) But even though they kept their interest in coffee alive with part-time jobs as baristas, they each went on to careers in their chosen academic fields after graduation. Charbonneau, an art major, restored art. Anderson, an environmental studies major, was doing ecological research on the Hudson River. But they each had the same compelling challenge—their jobs left them isolated, often alone in labs late at night.

"I wanted more interaction with people, so I got drawn back into the coffee thing," Charbonneau recalls.

"I remember having exactly the same feelings," Anderson chimes in.

So Charbonneau traveled to the coffee mecca—Seattle—where he learned the subtleties of



**On The Ground Floor:** (Top) Gregg Charbonneau (left) and Barth Anderson consult during a "cupping." (Bottom) Barrington Coffee Roasting Company can now spread out production in its new digs in Lee, Mass.



the coffee business. When he returned to the Berkshires, he started roasting at the South Main Street location and convinced Anderson to join him. In 1994, Charbonneau opened Lenox Coffee. It was then that his background in art met his passion for coffee. He introduced latte art—creating a design on the espresso when pouring the milk—which he had first seen in Seattle. "We do the latte art for two reasons. First, it looks amazing. People think it's so beautiful they almost don't want to drink it. But it's also a quality-control thing. For it to work, the espresso has to be prepared properly, the texture of the milk has to be perfect for combining with the espresso—it's not thin, it doesn't have too much air in it, it's just the right temperature. If you see the art work, you know the drink is going to taste just right," explains Charbonneau.

Latte art has become a Barrington signature. Coffeehouse customers can learn how to do it at one of three workshops the company offers: "Espresso Milk Steaming Techniques," "Espresso Fundamentals—Espresso Extraction, Theory and Practice," and "Coffee Fundamentals—From Farm to Cup."

But workshops are only one way the Barrington Coffee Roasting Company helps its customers. "Gregg and Barth mentored me through the whole process," recalls Rubenstein. "When I was having conversations with people to choose the coffee, other roasters offered to answer questions about their product. But Gregg and Barth were down here with me, working out all the filtration systems and setting up the electrical system for the machinery. They are partners through and through."

**W**ith the exception of winemaking, there is little else in the culinary field that is as complex as a good cup of coffee. It begins with the coffee tree that grows for five years before producing fruit. The beans are actually seeds in a fruit called a cherry, because that's what it looks like. Fruit must be picked at the perfect time, so at the estate coffee farms that produce the specialty coffees Barrington buys, each tree is picked several times to produce a crop. The fruit is soaked in water and then milled to extract the bean, known as green coffee. Green coffee can typically be stored, if carefully warehoused, for up to a year before roasting. But these beans are still thousands of miles away. They need to be shipped, warehoused, and often shipped again before they enter the roaster.

After the annual harvest in each region, the staff at Barrington tastes the coffee to make the selection for the next year in a process called a cupping. All together, Barrington buys coffee from between twenty-five and thirty suppliers all over the globe. "Because our [new] production facility in Lee is so much larger and also has a loading dock, eventually we'll be able to warehouse much of the coffee we currently have stored around the world," explains Anderson. Managing the buying, shipping, and warehousing of green coffee mainly falls to Anderson, who lives in Alford, Massachusetts, with his wife, Lisa, and their two-year-old son, Aidan. Charbonneau, who minds the books, pays the bills, and was chief of the new construction project in Lee, lives in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, with his wife Cherrise, and their two children Cole, 6, and Chloe, 3.

Charbonneau and Anderson have taken the biggest step in their business careers with the new facility in Lee. And they're very mindful of the risks of growth. "We don't want to be a Starbucks; we don't even want to be a Green Mountain. We just want to be a small, privately owned business. We're very clear that we don't want the infrastructure to get out of hand so that it's not fun anymore," says Anderson. "We want to have an extraordinary work environment, and we want to produce extraordinary coffee. These are big challenges. We don't take them lightly. We've been very careful to protect ourselves, our brand, and our livelihood for all of us. We think of Barrington Coffee Roasting as family." **BI**

*Susanna Opper, who lives and works in Alford, Massachusetts, writes about business.*

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