

## Barrington Coffee Roasting Co. Boston Mukunda Feldman, co-owner



Since 1993, Barrington Coffee Roasting has been helping to push forward New England’s specialty scene. But not until the beginning of this year did the company have its own café. To lead the charge into retail, the Western Massachusetts-based roastery turned to Mukunda Feldman, who spent a number of years

working for Barrington Coffee before opening three other Massachusetts shops (which he continues to run). The six-month-old café in Boston’s Fort Point neighborhood features Cup of Excellence winners and other top-notch coffees, but it prepares them using batch brewing and espresso as opposed to pour-over methods.

**Q:** Why did Barrington choose to open a retail space now?

**A:** Gregg Charbonneau and Barth Anderson [Barrington Coffee’s co-founders] are my friends from way back. I think I was their first full-time employee, in around 1997. We had talked for years about doing a retail project together, and it started to become apparent in the last few years that it would be really helpful for them to have their own location where the primary goal is to serve coffee to customers, but where they could also direct potential clients and say, “Here’s how we do it in our store.” There’s so much information out there about specialty coffee. As a roaster, if you don’t actively take part in making a statement about how you like to do it or how it should taste, then I think you start to get lost in the shuffle.

**Q:** What statements are you guys making in the Boston store?

**A:** Our main method of drip is with a Fetco brewer. Pour-over is great, and I make pour-over at home all the time, but in retail situations I’ve probably had more bad cups of pour-over than I’ve had good cups. I’ve also waited a really long time for it and paid a lot of money for it. So we have a Fetco and serve two coffees on it—something pushed a little darker and then a light, single-origin coffee. The coffees change pretty frequently. The fact that we’re the roaster and do it all ourselves allows us to offer coffees on drip that most places probably can’t. Right now we have a Cup of Excellence coffee from Rwanda on there. We had an Ethiopian from [boutique importer] Ninety Plus that probably retails for \$30 a pound on there.

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**Q:** How do you view your espresso program?

**A:** That's been a big point of emphasis at the shop. At the roaster, we of course have a cupping lab and an espresso machine where we fiddle with things, but in terms of espresso drink preparation, you can only hit a real stride with it in the context of retail service. You learn so much more about espresso and the way it evolves in the days after it's roasted through the rhythm of the service. Espresso and Americanos are sort of our answer to not having a slow bar. We can make it for you in about 60 seconds, and it's a really special thing that changes as we bring in different coffees. It's not something you can make at home.

**Q:** Do you do anything to draw attention to the special coffees available every day?

**A:** Our staff is pretty well versed in the coffees we're handling. But we really want people to come in and have an experience without a lot of bombardment. We like to think we can provide someone with an appreciation for something because it has inherent value, not because they've been told that it's special. We'd like to be able to put that cup in someone's hands and have them drink it and say, "Oh my god," and then get excited to learn more.

**Q:** Are you getting that type of reaction as often as you'd like?

**A:** It can be a struggle. New Englanders, we're wicked stubborn, you might say. People have grown up with Dunkin' Donuts. A broader population in Boston is starting to warm up to the idea of something different, but you're fighting against a more entrenched scene. We have people who come in and have a great experience where we have a great conversation and they have a great cup of coffee, and then the next day I'll see them walking past the store and they'll have a large iced coffee from Dunkin'. But I think it's happening. There's been a groundswell. The guys at Barismo [a small roaster located in Arlington, Mass.] are doing a lot, and Counter Culture is in town now.

**Q:** Do you Boston coffee folks ever feel overshadowed by all the attention New York's been getting?

**A:** New York is New York and is awesome, but the thing about Boston is it's a very livable city. You can walk around. You can bike around. There's green space, and it's a great place to live. I think café culture is an extension of that—it's time for that in Boston. There's also been a great cocktail culture that's developed here in the last six or seven years. We have this amazing collection of cocktail bars, and it doesn't take long before cocktail nerds start to think more deeply about the coffee they're drinking. ☺