

Bean counters add up treat

By **JO-AN RECHTIN**
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Coffee has always been more than a simple brew to wake people up in the mornings. But Kathy Niness and Mark Izzo have brought java to a new form.

They created Caffe Acapella Gourmet Coffee Bars – an item that would speak to coffee and chocolate lovers alike.

“We looked to combine two things that people would rather not live without – coffee and chocolate,” said Niness, of Berwyn.

Could a rich, smooth candy be made using the coffee bean?

West Chester resident Izzo, who has a doctorate in food science, was not so sure. The cocoa butter in cocoa beans gives chocolate the silken smooth texture we all crave. A coffee bean cannot form the same structure.

But could cocoa butter extracted from cocoa beans some how be blended with coffee to create such a confection? Using the formula that chocolate making is based upon, Niness and Izzo began performing scientific trials in Izzo’s kitchen. Common kitchen apparatus were enlisted, along with handy-dandy garage implements like a heat lamp to keep the cocoa butter at just the right temperature. “I think Mark’s wife was getting a bit frustrated with our makeshift factory/laboratory by the time we were ready to move our trials out of the kitchen,” said Niness.

But the trials were highly successful. The results led Izzo and Niness to create a revolutionary new product – the world’s first edible coffee. “This is coffee in its most indulgent form,” Niness said.

Hailed by many at the recent New York Fancy Food Show, the candy bars look like chocolate. They taste much like chocolate. The mouth-feel is as creamy smooth as chocolate – so much that most people find it hard to believe the candy contains no chocolate.

Coffee bar creation tastes like chocolate



The coffee beans in Caffe Acapella Gourmet Coffee Bars are roasted to intensify the flavor.

The all-natural bars come in four flavors. Espresso Serenade is a rich, full-bodied extra bold Italian roast balanced with a hint of sweetness. Caramel Macchiato Classico is a bold, full-bodied espresso balanced with smooth fresh cream caramel. Cappuccino Connoisseur is an elegant duet of flavorful espresso with velvety milk and Toffee Espresso Concerto combines full-bodied Italian roast with buttery English toffee.

“Once they have tried the bars, coffee lovers definitely come back to re-purchase,” said Exton Country Store owner Jeanne Miller, adding, “we love that they are unique, have a striking visual wrapping, and that they are made in Pennsylvania.”

There may be several reasons coffee lovers tune in to the flavors of Caffe Acapella bars. Niness explained that often chocolate-coffee product flavors tend to contradict one another. That fact drove the mission to create authentic coffee candy that could stand alone. Izzo and Niness found that in order for the coffee bar to beckon sweet response, they had to start with gourmet coffee beans and pay careful attention to the quality, flavor and aroma of the coffee.

They buy beans from Columbia, Brazil, Papau, New Guinea and Sumatra. The beans are double or triple picked to rid the batch of defective beans and assure top quality. Then the beans are dark Italian roasted to bring out the complexity. The candy is created as soon after the coffee beans are roasted as possible, because the fresh-roasted coffee creates the most intense and flavorful candy. The bars are manufactured at a facility north of State College.

“We learned cupping – a method of grading coffee,” explained Niness. The roasted,

ground coffee is laid out in cups. Boiling water is poured on the grounds and a crust forms. The crust is cut with a spoon and first aromas are described and noted. Then it is tasted. At this point if something is not quite right it can be picked up. The flavor profile Caffe Acapella seeks is nutty, sweet enough for the sugar to enhance, bold in a nice way, and vibrant. The flavor and aroma notes that are not appreciated in their candy formula include earthy, grassy, and smoky notes.

Although there is no added caffeine, the bars are made from coffee beans and contain about the same amount of caffeine as a relative cup of “joe.”

More information about Caffe Acapella bars is available at its Web site, www.acapellafoods.com.

Decadent Candy Brew

- 1/2 Caffe Acapella Bar (1-ounce)
- 1 cup boiling water

Place 1 ounce of your favorite Caffe Acapella bar in the bottom of a coffee mug. Fill mug with hot water and stir. If desired, top with whipped cream and Caffe Acapella shavings.