

In Pursuit of the Perfect Brew

Ringwood Drive coffee connoisseur turns daily grind into an art form

Mark Hayward is passionate about coffee.

Most days will find him at his Velvet Sunrise Coffee Roasters enterprise where he feeds as many as 1,500 pounds of green coffee beans a week into an updated vintage German-made Probat Roaster. The finished product is purchased by independent coffee houses from Hamilton to Port Perry. His specialty joe is also available to retail customers six days a week at the Ringwood Drive roastery outlet. Cafe Day, held each Saturday, offers java junkies the opportunity to sample exclusive blends, attend coffee making classes and enjoy the baked treats prepared by Mark's wife Lisa Darchiville, a professional caterer. "It's becoming a bit of a local meeting place," said Mark of the retail side of the business.

Mark wasn't always a coffee fanatic. A trained civil engineer, he was working as a project manager in the GTA when he felt the itch for a career change. "I got tired of the daily grind," said Mark. "I started to get involved in roasting coffee beans from all over the world for home use. I saw there were no sources of freshly roasted coffee in York Region."

At the same time his wife had just stopped working as a caterer at a local retreat centre but wanted to continue in the business. "So I said to her, 'Why don't we start a business together.'" The couple started Velvet Sunrise and six years later business continues to thrive. They were joined recently by their daughter Natasha, who serves in a communications capacity.

Mark's knowledge of coffee, its origin, history and the regions of the world where it is grown could fill a book. Engage him in conversation about his favourite subject and he'll tell you that that the birthplace of the coffee bean was Ethiopia, where natural growing heirloom varieties were first discovered centuries ago. "Ethiopia also has a long tradition of coffee consumption. It's a daily ritual where coffee beans are roasted, ground, brewed and drunk in one sitting among family and friends."

While geography prevents him from being able to match the Ethiopians' same

day routine, Mark does all he can to hurry the process of getting the coffee to his customers while it is still at the height of it's flavour. "One of our goals as a coffee roaster is to get the beans from the grower as soon as possible. The sooner it can be shipped to the roaster the tastier it will be."

He said Velvet Sunrise brings in beans from the four coffee regions of the world - Indonesia, Africa, South and Central America. "Coffee only grows in the Tropics between Cancer and Capricorn. Mountain grown coffee is best as a general rule. The higher up it is grown the finer the potential quality."

But without proper handling by the farmer and the roaster even the finest coffee beans can disappoint, he noted. For Mark, nothing is left to chance in making sure the coffee he sells is at its best. Beans are only brought in from each region during a two to three week peak harvest time, during which time he works with importers to expedite shipping. He then develops a roasting process with each bean to maximize the flavour. "We will sample roast the same beans at different temperatures, grind a sample, steep it in hot water, then 'slurp' it to evaluate flavour, aroma, acidity, body, balance, sweetness and after taste. We make notes on what we are tasting - for instance chocolate, hazelnuts, almond, or fruits such as citrus, blueberry, peach etc. This way we find the blend that best presents the positive attributes of the bean."

Mark also relies on his own take when choosing coffees to make available to his customers. "It's a combination of the best quality and the coffees that I love and would like to share with our customers. At any given time we'll have from 8-10 single origin coffees on hand plus four signature blends for brewed coffee or espresso."

In the end, Mark feels that much of the success of Velvet Sunrise is due to his personal interest in the art of roasting and brewing coffee. "One of the most valuable parts that has developed is the relationship with our customers, retail and wholesale. They rely on us as a resource. We become an integral part of their operation."



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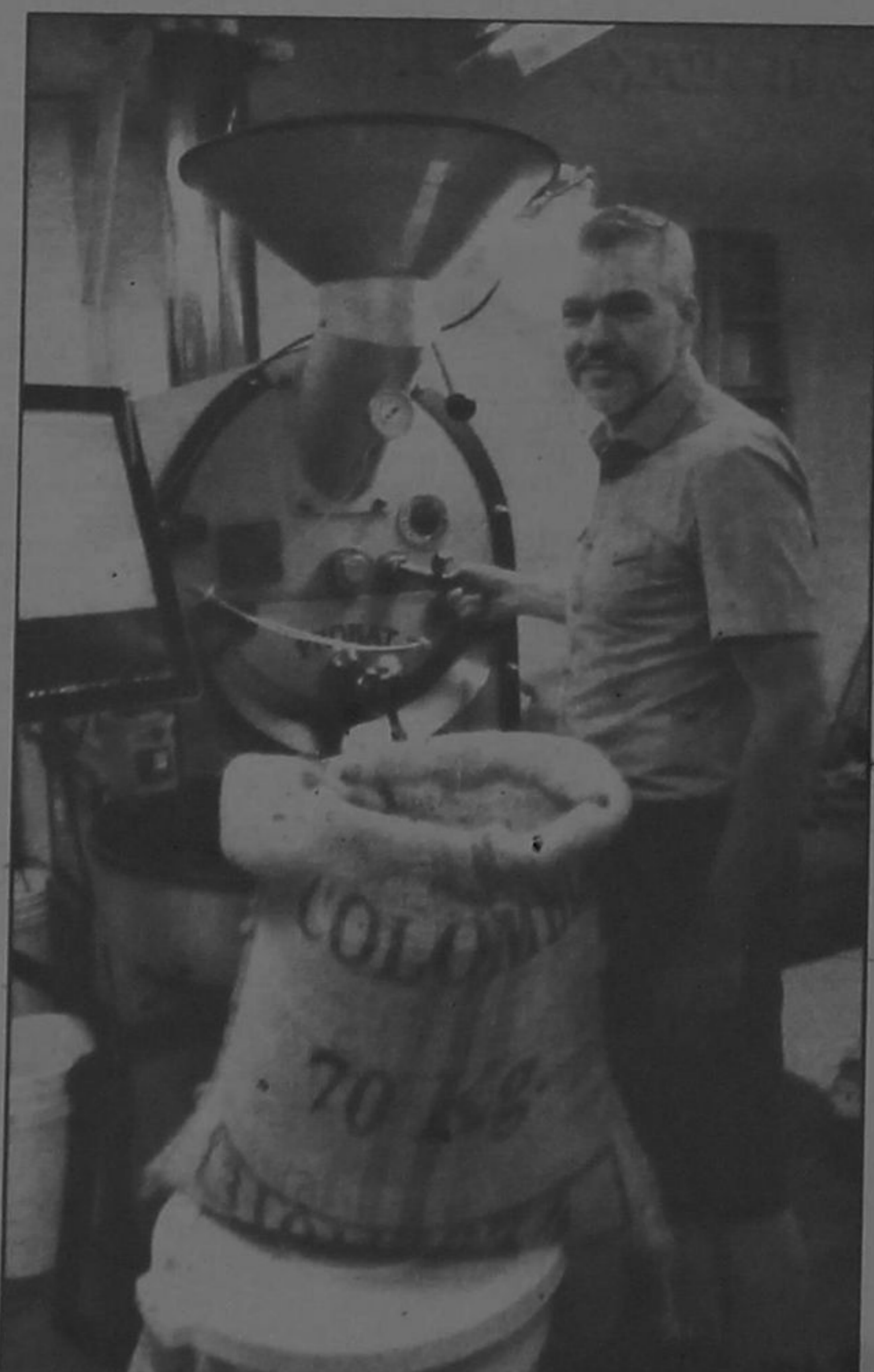
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Top Right: Mark Hayward and his wife Lisa Darchiville founded Velvet Sunrise Coffee Roasters in 2009. Their daughter Natasha helps with communications

Left: Mark Hayward processes 1,500 pounds of coffee beans a week in his German-made vintage Probat Roaster