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Creating Intoxicating Brews at Coffee Labs Roasters, in Tarrytown

By STEVE REDDICLIFFE APRIL 9, 2016

During its early years, written accounts and conversations about Coffee Labs Roasters on Main Street in Tarrytown invariably included an endearing annotation that the name of the shop was not a reference to a brewing workshop but to the owners' dogs, two chocolate Labradors.

Still, even with the store's panting-pooch logo and the welcome mat that reads "Wipe Your Paws," any customer could be excused for leaning toward the laboratory designation, given the Diedrich roaster in the middle of the shop, the Hario V60 pour-over device, the La Marzocco espresso machine, the owners' commitment to working closely with farmers in places like Burundi and Honduras and, of course, the consistently outstanding coffee.

Now, 13 years into its run, Coffee Labs can add to that list a series of creative collaborations with local brewers like Peekskill and Sloop, and with Taconic Distillery.

"Working with other small craftsmen within the Hudson Valley, it's just something that benefits us, benefits other small businesses," said Mike Love, who owns Coffee Labs with his wife, Alicia.



"You've got to keep stuff fun when you're doing something for so long," he added. "The collaboration thing really came out of left field."

It started with Peekskill, with a black IPA called Midnight Toker (easier to remember than pompatus of love), but the enduring hit has been the Wake Up Call, a pale ale made with beans from Villa Gladys, in Colombia, roasted by Coffee Labs.

"Do you like cold-pressed coffee?" the bartender at Peekskill Brewery asked when I ordered a pint on a recent visit. "It's like that — you get the berry notes." (She was right, and it went well with one of the brewery's very good cheeseburgers.)

Photo
Lattes, complete with foam art, are pulled from the shop's La Marzocco espresso machine. Credit Suzy Allman for The New York Times

Levy, the head brewer at Peekskill. He called Villa Gladys "a beautiful, beautiful coffee."

"It has this nuttiness to it, some chocolate, but it also has this big mandarin orange thing too, if you play the acidity right," he added. "That's why I think the beer shines."

One commenter on the Beer Advocate website commended it as "refreshing like an iced coffee," adding, "All the appeal of thick rich coffee stouts but great for spring and summer days like a pale or wheat ale."

Mr. Levy lives a block from Coffee Labs. "So I'm there all the time talking with Mike," he said. "I really respect his palate and his mind. We have big plans for the future with different coffees and different ways we want to do it."

Photo
Patrons of the shop, one of whom is sitting on a rum cask used to age coffee beans. Credit Suzy Allman for The New York Times

And does Wake Up Call work as a wake-up call?

"It does for me, at least," he said, laughing.



A project with Sloop Brewing Company (in Elizaville) and Underground Coffee and Ales (in Highland) produced an oatmeal stout called Underground Baked (no Steve Miller lyric pops into your head with this one), a silky sipper that tastes like a Manhattan Special soda with a beer-school diploma. (The bars at local DeCicco's grocery stores sometimes have Underground Baked on tap; I tried it during a Sloop night last month at Rattle N Hum on West 39th Street in Manhattan.)

In the spirits sphere, Coffee Labs worked with Matt Frohman from Taconic Distillery in Stanfordville and made a barrel-aged coffee called Drunken Dog.

Many companies have done barrel-aged coffees, Mr. Love said, using white-oak, wine and old beer barrels. "It's all come out kind of eh," he said, "so we took everything we knew about barreling and aging coffee, put it to the right side — and we went left and did everything else."

What they did was put green, unroasted beans in a barrel that had been used for rye and then rum at Taconic, aged them for three months ("It created its own microclimate inside the barrel," Mr. Love explained), roasted them "and boom, Drunken Dog was there," he said.

Photo
A pint of Wake Up Call, a pale ale from Peekskill Brewery made with Colombian beans roasted by Coffee Labs. Credit Suzy Allman for The New York Times

It was a brewing breakthrough: a fantastic coffee with an enticing undertone of rum, and of rye on the sly, served either cold-brewed or in a pour-over presentation at the store (or sold as beans for brewing at home). The first batch sold out quickly, but a second barrel has a place of prominence near the roaster.

While those beans are aging, the Loves will be working on expanding Coffee Labs. They bought the old quarters of Hank's Alley, a long-running antiques store around the corner, where they will roast beans and hold events. And they will open a store at the Ritz-Carlton in White Plains this summer.

But they are hardly done with culinary alliances. Mr. Love, a former chef who describes himself as a "big, big cider guy," said he is close to finding

"a cider company that I really click with, like Matt and Peekskill." He has ordered the dried coffee cherries called cascara from the highly regarded farmer Aida Batlle in El Salvador as a principal ingredient.

"You rehydrate them and you can make a tea," he said happily. "Really sweet, light caffeine — insanely flavorful."

Coffee Labs Roasters - 7 Main Street, Tarrytown 914-332-1479 coffeelabs.com

The Bill Coffee from \$2.10 (single espresso). Large latte, \$3.75. Pour-over of Drunken Dog, \$5; pound to go, \$15. Pastries from local bakers like Red Barn Bakery in Irvington and Flour & Sun Bakery in Pleasantville from \$2.10. (Flour & Sun's Saw Mill River Bar is particularly good, \$3.25.)

If You Go Open Mondays and Tuesdays, 6:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.; Wednesdays and Thursdays, 6:30 a.m. to 8 p.m.; Fridays, 6:30 a.m. to 10:30 p.m.; Saturdays, 8 a.m. to 10:30 p.m.; Sundays, 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. Live music on Friday and Saturday nights. Parking on the street or in municipal lots. There is no ramp, but people who use wheelchairs have been able to manage the single step into Coffee Labs; the restroom is accessible.

Peekskill Brewery, 47-53 South Water Street, Peekskill 914-734-2337

The Bill Pint of Wake Up Call, \$6; growler fill, \$18.

If You Go Tap room is open Mondays through Thursdays, 3 p.m. to midnight; Fridays, 3 p.m. to 1 a.m.; Saturdays, noon to 1 a.m.; Sundays, noon to midnight. Food is served in the second-floor restaurant and pub (and in the tap room during operating hours) Mondays through Saturdays, noon to 10 p.m., and Sundays, noon to 9 p.m. Parking lots on either side of the restaurant. A municipal lot nearby is available in the evening. Wheelchair accessible.