

# TEA & COFFEE

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## Café Society

with Jonathan Bell

# Birth Of A Line

Starting up a new line of coffee brewers is a daunting task. Jonathan Bell tells the story of one such company – La Piccola.

**IT TAKES COURAGE TO START UP** a coffee brewing machine company from scratch. The brewing machine market is such that demands are exorbitant on technical expertise, design and marketing capabilities. At the heart of such a venture, besides capital, is ambition and imagination, courage and tenacity. Experienced colleagues and workers are absolute prerequisites, and they in themselves are perhaps more precious than capital.

The story outlined above is the history of La Piccola. The company began producing espresso pod brewing machines less than a decade ago, but by successfully entering unique technologies and designs, and targeting a specific sales sector of its own — pod serving machines — La Piccola has grown into an international player in its market niche.

For a year now, the firm has worked from a newly built, large factory in the town of Pedenghe sul Garda, not so far — as indicated by the name — from Italy's famous Lago de Garda. La Piccola employs up to 25 people, some seasonally, and is producing thousands of its models each year for an ever-increasing demand. La Piccola espresso pod brewing machines are sold in all European nations, throughout North America, and as far away as Australia and China.

La Piccola is not a miracle venture. It arose in tandem with a totally separate, yet related firm, the roasting company Lucaffe. Both are the children of a most enterprising young man, whose last name, like that of the location of his factory, is quite reminiscent of his true nature - Luca Venturella;

a venturing man in his mid thirties who has given his life over to a devotion to coffee.

The La Piccola range is primarily differentiated by body styling. Key elements are found throughout the line, including patented innovations. People looking over the line may be drawn to various model pricings, to shapes and colors that meet



particular buyer interests, for various serving volume needs; but to study one specific model can say much about the spirit of the entire range.

Take, for example, the Sara Classic Inox model. This is a serious little brewer indeed, it stands only 30.5 centimeters and weighs 7.5 kilos. Inside the elegantly simple stainless steel housing, however, is a unique world of brewing technology, including a separate heat exchange system for the serving group, a stainless steel boiler for the water, and a full 15 bar pressure extraction of beverage from the pods (coffee or tea). This model also features quite prominently, for the extraction process, a patented lever system that gives the operator a traditional espresso 'feel' even with the simplicity of using pods.

The heat exchanger system, which is noted by a glowing red 'ready' light, means that the unit is ready to use in about one minute. The serving temperature remains constant too as long as the serving light is on.

To get an espresso one simply puts an espresso cup into the niche provided for it; lifts the lever and the serving head opens; slip a coffee or tea pod into the serving head cradle, releasing the lever; press the serving button — which then glows red — and



depress the lever. With the lever down one can answer the phone if necessary while the beverage flows into the cup as a dainty stream from the stainless steel serving spout. When the cup is full to one's preferred level, simply push the serving button to off and your

## ...cogitating new concepts to keep coffee vibrant.

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espresso is ready.

The Sara has a built in three liter water tank. The top area of the model is an automatic cup warmer. It also features a safety thermostat and low power consumption. By special design, there is no mineral deposit build up.

The unit is also offered with a double boiler, with its own heat exchanger, hot water and steam wand, and a milk-foam steam holder. While the Inox (stainless steel) model has a distinctively classy look, the model comes in a rainbow assortment of colors.

Sara is obviously designed with office use in mind, although it would do well also in small hotels or bars with low-espresso sales volumes. To the contrary, the La Piccola 'Cecilia' range is for more professional usage.

Cecilia is made in models ranging from one to three serving groups. The one-group unit weighs-in as a basic model at 20 kilos; but the weight does add up if one opts for the double boiler version with stainless steel steam wand, and milk foam holder. The same patented systems and high quality

materials that distinguish the Sara are also found in the Cecilia series.

Most impressive in the Cecilia range's three group model, is the double serving spout head, which allows for four espressos to be made at the same time. Due to the heat exchange system, one for each serving head, and boiler warming system, this big Cecilia warms up as quickly as the Sara, and maintains constant serving temperatures as well. With this system plus a double boiler, an operator can basically be assured of little if any complete down time in running.

In contrast to the sober, minimalist beauty of the Sara and Cecilia model lines, Luca has added his BAT series — so called because the body facing does indeed bear a certain whimsical resemblance to an abstract Batman mask.

The Bats are clearly for espresso fun, for pleasing a young office/bar clientel, or to fit into the kitchen of any young-and-smart city worker. Bats can have all the same accouterments as other La Piccola brewers, and are built to the same standard although more petite in size. They also have the La Piccola signature, which is a serving head fitted with that long endearing espresso extraction lever.

La Piccola sales manager, in office in Pedenghe sul Garda, is Marco Guerrini. Luca Venturella is also there, in the flesh at least — the rest of him might be off and away cogitating new ideas, designs, and concepts to keep coffee a vibrant product. 