

What's the Rush?

Where it come from, coffee is all about slow

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by Kim Dietrich

Tim Horton's (47 downtown locations and counting) has been pouring Canadians steaming cups of coffee since 1964 – long enough to make “double-double” part of the lexicon. Pre-measured, vacuum-sealed foil packets of pre-roasted arabica beans ensure that every pot yields a uniform brew. In what has become a modern-day ritual, we zip into Timmy's each morning for a quick caffeine hit, downing it on the way to work, and then, in season, rolling up the rim to (usually) lose.

Now, from a different civilization, comes another coffee-centred ritual rooted not in rush but in relaxation. Born in Ethiopia, where coffee was first discovered – in the province of Kafa – Aster Belayneh recreates her homeland's traditional coffee ceremony at her Queen Street restaurant, **Addis Ababa** (1184 Queen St. W., 416-538-0059). Tossing a handful of rock-hard, green coffee beans into a long-handled iron pot, she shakes them over a high flame till they begin to smoke and crackle. Once they give off the perfect scent, about three minutes later, she transfers them to a small wicker bowl stained with coffee bean oil. “Roasting the beans each time makes all the difference in the flavour,” she says. After grinding the beans, she steeps them in boiling water in a tall, ceremonial clay pot, then pours the result into small porcelain cups. On a lit cube of charcoal, a bit of frankincense burns, for spiritual purposes – to cleanse, heal and calm. The coffee ceremony itself, says Belayneh, offers “time to value oneself, instead of always rushing.” She recommends brewing the same beans three times, nodding one time each to peace health and the spirit.