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but first, coffee

Welcome Coffee Co. founder June Habib on growing a business, coffee cupping, and cultivation.



COFFEE CUPPING EXPERIENCE

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I meet June Habib outside of Cutler's Distillery & Public House, the shared home of her newly opened roastery. A decade ago, June founded Welcome Coffee Co., a business that began as a mobile coffee cart and has since become a beloved staple in the Santa Barbara community. Inside, she introduces me to my first-ever coffee cupping experience—think wine tasting, but for coffee. Together, we sample and roast a batch of her deeply fragrant, full-bodied “June's Friend Blend,” talking through coffee origins, flavor notes, and what's next for her.

June grew up in rural Iowa, surrounded by farmers. “I was in 4-H (Head, Heart, Hands, Health) and FFA (Future Farmers of America), so agriculture was very much a part of my life, and still is,” she says. It was there that she cultivated a deep respect for the land and a lasting commitment to ethical farming practices.

What began as a trip to New Zealand soon turned into years spent working on a boat, sailing and traveling around the world. By 2013, June's journey brought her to Croatia—an experience that would shape her life in meaningful ways. In the alleyways of Zagreb, dotted with artisan coffee shops, she discovered both her love for coffee and a sense of purpose. Speaking about the many coffee shop owners she met there, she enthusiastically states, “They were like the mecca of cool!” It was also in Zagreb where June realized how little most people think about the coffee bean supply chain, a realization that sparked her curiosity.

She eventually settled in Santa Barbara and established herself as a coffee trailblazer and champion of ethical sourcing. She started working at a local coffee shop called The French Press as a trainer and educator, then went on to launch Welcome Coffee Co., back when coffee carts were neither trendy nor well known. In many ways, she was a pioneer, creating a business model that would inspire others to follow.

Welcome Coffee Co. has since grown to include two coffee carts and a busy calendar of community, celebrity, and corporate events, with appearances for companies like Zoom, LinkedIn, Deckers, and more. In fact, while running her coffee cart on LinkedIn's campus, she met Lauren, who is now her wife. She credits coffee as the reason for their kismet union.

June offers a rare opportunity for businesses to purchase coffee in bulk from a local female entrepreneur who prioritizes supporting all-women co-ops. Beyond events and wholesale orders, her blends are available at local gems like Idyll Mercantile, Flower Girl Bodega, Motley Crew Marketplace and Ranch in Buellton, and the soon-to-open Coyote's Market in Carpinteria.





JUNE HABIB

Her coffee is also available for locals to enjoy at Elsie's Tavern, a well-known dive bar. More than placement, June's partnerships mean a great deal to her. "I am very intentional about who carries my product," she says. "I have a personal relationship with the owners of all these places." She begins recalling local shop owners by name, praising each for a defining quality, a detail I find endearing and perfectly in line with who June is as a person.

One thing that immediately stands out about June is her willingness to uplift and support those around her. In 2021, she joined fundraising efforts to save Summerland Farm, which was at risk of being sold to investors for development. And that's just one example. When AppFolio was designing their on-campus café and launching a coffee program, they enlisted June's expertise. Where others might see competition, she sees opportunity to help. She guides aspiring coffee cart owners, crafting their architectural diagrams, taking hour-long phone calls, sharing equipment lists, and more. Her mentorship has inspired countless mobile coffee businesses across the United States, earning Welcome Coffee Co. the nickname "the coffee catering blueprint everyone copied."

In the same vein, she's quick to give credit to those who've helped her along the way, including Dart Coffee, which allows her to share a pallet on coffee bean orders to save on shipping costs, Dennis and Carrie of Coastal Coffee Collective, who taught her a great deal about roasting and sourcing, and Becky and Jadyn, friends she credits with helping her "nail the aesthetic and branding of the business."

Most recently, Welcome Coffee Co. was a vendor at Santa Barbara's first-ever Coffee Culture Fest where June served as a judge for The Latte Art Throwdown and joined the festival's Roaster's Panel, sharing insights on sourcing, roasting, flavor development, and more.

As we wrap up our tour of the roastery she shares with Cutler's Distillery—a fun partnership that has led to the creation of their new coffee liqueur, available at the distillery and used in their coffee cocktails—we dive into our cupping extravaganza. This experience is exclusively available to members of Welcome Coffee Co.'s "Locals Only" coffee subscription, which ships June's blends directly to your doorstep.

My first revelation: coffee beans are naturally green prior to being roasted. Mind blown. Perhaps common sense to those deep in the coffee world, but for an avid coffee lover who's never given much thought to beans, it's fascinating. June fervently points to a supply chain diagram on the

wall, illustrating the long journey beans take from farm to cup. Then she gestures to a diagram of a cherry—another revelation. Coffee beans are carefully harvested from the inside of a small red fruit called a cherry.

It's clear that June is not only educated in her craft but also incredibly passionate. Her eyes light up as she guides me through the cupping experience, pausing to check on the beans roasting in her industrial coffee roaster, made by Mill City Roasters in Minneapolis, the same city where she attended roasting school. "I just love the Midwest, and I love their machines," she says with a smile.

The name of the coffee cupping game is exactly what it sounds like: tasting spoonfuls of different brews in cups, much like sampling soup, and analyzing the flavor notes and how the coffee hits your tongue. For example, "June's Friend Blend," crafted from beans sourced in Peru, Colombia, and Ethiopia, offers a rich chocolatey aroma and a wonderfully smooth taste. We bond over the scent, which reminds me of my boyfriend, Atticus. June replies affectionately, "It reminds me of my grandpa, who's 99." She adds, "That's why people love coffee so much—the smell takes them back. It reminds them of their childhood or someone they love." I tuck this quote delicately in my mind, pulling it back out now as I sit down to write this article.

I soon discover that each blend has its own distinct flavor and aroma. "June's Friend Blend," my personal favorite of the afternoon, stands out in flavor, and the decaf blend she's concocted is equally delicious. "I just want people to know that every single coffee bean in my product is ethically sourced. That's number one for me," she says proudly. "And number two, I'm accessible. People can reach out to me and nerd out with me. I want them to know exactly what they're spending their money on." I can tell she truly means it.

I often say, "people drink coffee to wake up, but I wake up to drink coffee." That's how much I love the age-old drink. Growing up Armenian in a culture deeply rooted in oversharing and overeating over a potent cup of *soorj*, or Armenian coffee, the drink has been a constant in my life for as long as I can remember. But before meeting June, I had never stopped to consider the laborious journey each bean takes to reach my cup, transforming in form, color, and taste along the way. It's a long path from cultivation to consumption, and one that can often be exploitative, which is why conversations like the one I had with June matter. She's taken the extra steps to ensure her beans are ethically sourced and roasted with love and purpose. More than that, she's eager to share what she knows, inviting others into her world with an openness that sparks childlike wonder.*