

MEET THE ANTIPRESS: LA MILL COFFEE

The caffeine obsessive's newest laboratory

BY JONATHAN GOLD

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When you order a cup of aged Sumatran peaberry at the new **La Mill** in Silver Lake, a coffee sommelier comes out to your table to explain the nuances of the brew, setting down a willowy carafe encased in tight, zippered neoprene and leaving an electronic egg timer ticking down from three minutes. When the last second has passed, he reappears. He unzips the beverage's catsuit. With a special spoon, he breaks the crust that has formed at the surface and stirs until the grounds settle to the bottom. He produces a thin mesh cone that looks as if it may have been part of the costume Madonna's backup dancers wore circa 1988, and plunges it into the hot liquid. A second later, there is clear, limpid coffee in your cup, light-roasted, smelling rather more of fruits and flowers than of whatever it is Starbucks peaberry smells like. The coffee guy zips up the neoprene and grins.

Even in a city devoted to the cult of coffee, La Mill, a bit of Hollywood Regency overload in the epicenter of California modernism, stands out in many important ways. The roster of coffees and teas is as long and detailed as an ambitious restaurant's wine list, and you can have your coffee prepared using any of half a dozen methods, including French press, Chemex, siphon, espresso and Eva Solo, the neoprene-suited carafe method described earlier, which is supposed to be closest to the cupping ritual professional coffee tasters use to evaluate beans. (Clover, the \$11,000 machine that stands at the altar of the other serious coffeehouses in town, is only the default cup here.)

The roasts are all intentionally light, emphasizing winy zippiness over chocolate thunder — one house favorite, from Kenya, smells alarmingly like hot tomato soup. You will find specialty drinks like Coffee and a Cigarette, more of a spoonable dessert made with espresso and tobacco-infused cream, or Coffee and a Doughnut, which tastes exactly like a jelly doughnut dunked in joe. And the menu is put together by chef Michael Cimarusti and pastry chef Adrian Vasquez of Providence, which means instead of damp roll-ups there are Asian BLTs constructed from spiced pork belly, a pretty close facsimile of Providence's clam chowder and cured Tasmanian sea trout with crushed wasabi peas.

La Mill Coffee, 1636 Silver Lake Blvd., Silver Lake, (323) 663-4462.