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# COFFEE **TALK**



[www.CoffeeTalk.com](http://www.CoffeeTalk.com)

## The "Chain of Custody"

By Timothy Castle

The Pod, People

A sneak peek at *Uncommon Grounds*,  
2nd Edition

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# Chain, Chain, Chain...Chain of Brews

Understanding the "Chain of Custody" by Timothy Castle

# COFFEE TALK




Fonté Café and Wine Bar



The Pod, People



The survey says...

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# Retailer Profile: Fonté Café and Wine Bar

by Maxim Vershinin

In our last profile, we tasted some of the rustic and spiritual flavors of the Vashon Island Coffee Roasterie, but today, the flavors are going to be pure quality and luxury.

First, we are going to Fonte Café and Wine Bar, Fonté Coffee Roasting's newly born venture. For those of you who are not familiar with Fonte it is an eighteen-year-old roasting company that takes pride in providing exquisite quality coffee to its high-end clientele from The Four Seasons Hotels, the Wynn Resort in Las Vegas, and the Peninsula, to award-winning chefs and fine restaurants.

The bar is in downtown Seattle, on the first floor of the Four Seasons Hotel, right across from the Seattle Art Museum. The venture transforms itself daily from being a quick-stop lunch, coffee shop in the morning to more of a chill, wine glass and delicious European pizza environment at night.

Meet Paul Odom, Fonte's owner, and the bar's "shopkeeper" as he calls himself.

V. *Did Fonte roasting company have any previous retailing experience?*

O. Yes, we used to have 8 cafes in Los Angeles, Anchorage Al, and Chicago. It was a lot of work to do then, and I was the only guy dealing with it. We worked for several years, just focusing on wholesale, roasting plant being in Seattle, and had virtually no one in Seattle, who knew us, so we sold the stores off one by one.

V. *So, how did this café come to exist?*

O. The whole idea of this bar is to promote what we do as a coffee roaster, as opposed to just make money. We try to show that there are coffees out there that are unique, and that is what we are all about as a coffee roasters. There are lots of great coffees out there, it is not a secret, they are well known, but whether you are willing to put resources exploring them, shows if you really care about the quality of the coffee you sell.

V. *Is there anything like Fonte's café and bar in Seattle?*

O. Nobody is doing that kind of stuff in Seattle, which is a no-brainer to me. For example, we have a high-end class Ethiopian coffee that nobody has, as well as a multitude of others, and we are happy to let anybody taste it here in the bar. It is so much fun to make a cup, serve it and watch the audience go "wow." There is more to it than just making money.

V. *Being a roaster and a retailer, it must be hard to balance the issues that might arise from competing with your own customers. How did you manage to solve the problem?*

O. I am trying to do something unique enough where I am not competing with anybody, and we've managed to avoid some problems here in Seattle. I

would love to open a second place in New York, but if I open my bar in midtown, where most of my customers are, we will be competing. I am not going to do it in Chinatown. (Laughs.)

V. *How did Fonte start out?*

O. There was a company in Seattle, made up of former Starbucks employees. They were going broke, and I got a roasting machine from them. Steve Smith, 30-year roasting veteran became my master roaster.

V. *What has changed, as you got bigger?*

O. Most coffee companies as they get bigger, they start cutting corners, and the minute you start cutting corners you get found out, and it is not fun. Fonté, on the other side, strives to deliver the highest quality possible; even if it means smaller profits for the company. I don't have to go out and sell what we do, as much as talk about what we do. And my philosophy is that if you aren't into it, you aren't into it, but there are a heck of a people who are.



After the interview at the bar with Odom, I decided to have a chat with Fonté's master roaster Steve Smith at the Fonté roasting plant in South Seattle.

V. *What is the core of the roasting processes at Fonte?*

S. Freshness is the most important part of what we do. Thanks to our roast-to-order system our coffee is like produce, like a head of lettuce, an equivalent of an organic food store, only more perishable. We are able to achieve characteristics in a cup that you can't achieve outside of that system. For us, our priority is to get those flavors alive. However, one of the other important aspects of our business is a true collaboration with our clients. We can roast some of the most incredible coffees, but our clients must treat it right. That is why we closely monitor the way Fonté's products are being delivered to our clients' customers all over the world. That sets us apart and that forms a key part of our identity.

V. *Do you do any prayers or rituals while roasting coffee?*

S. No ritual, but a certain level of superstition, yes. For me it is the "standing on one-foot" principle. After one of the cupping's, I noticed that the flavors were different, even though the roasting process was the same. I couldn't remember much of what I did different, except that I was standing on one foot, instead of both. So since then on, I stand on one foot instead of two.

