

PROFILE:
KYLE
GLANVILLE

Kyle Glanville discovered coffee at church. He was seven years old and began drinking coffee post-communion. He says, "My folks didn't really care if I had a little, so I'd douse it with cream and sugar and take a gulp." Glanville has come a long way from "big urns of horrendous coffee." He's the current U.S. Barista Champion and has worked with Intelligentsia to become one of L.A.'s leading coffee professionals.

In high school, in Carmel Valley, California, Glanville would hang out at Carmel Valley Coffee Roasting Company, a coffeehouse frequented by punk rockers, "drinking 16-ounce coffees for hours." Finally, he got a job there.

He visited his older sister in Seattle and had a coffee epiphany, remembering, "I had a vanilla latte at Espresso Vivace, one of the more renowned espresso bars in the world. I was so blown away by all the details, finesse and professionalism of the baristas, that I quickly made up my mind that I was going to be living in Seattle."

In 2001, Glanville moved to Seattle to study theatre at Cornish College of the Arts. Right before he arrived, his sister moved to San Diego. Glanville considered this a blessing, saying, "I didn't have the family safety net, so I had to go from living with my mom and being sort of a deadbeat to figuring out how to cut it on my own."

Cutting it involved working for Victrola, a small roasting company. He remembers, "Little things I was doing on the bar were having such a tremendous impact on the outcome of the beverage or espresso. I didn't have any answers for why. Espresso was misunderstood, and the owners didn't have the answers. They said, 'Why don't you become the trainer and teach people how to make coffee and try to figure out this stuff.'" Glanville spent the next two years working to master coffee.

BY JOSHUA
LURIE

In 2005, Seattle hosted the annual Specialty Coffee Association of America Conference, which allowed Glanville to connect with other coffee professionals for the first time. He remembers, "People were coming through [Victrola] and tasting our coffee and saying, 'Oh my god, you guys are the vanguard.' We thought we didn't know anything... That was a big enlightening moment."

Glanville parted with Victrola after four years, on the eve of another SCAA Conference, and flew there immediately. "I felt like it would be a good time for me to network, seeing how I was suddenly jobless," he says. "I crashed on hotel room floors, shook hands with a lot of people." One hand belonged to Intelligentsia owner Doug Zell, who was expanding operations to Los Angeles. Glanville told Zell, "I would like to work for Intelligentsia. I would not like to move to Los Angeles."

Glanville and friend Tony Konecny were on the verge of joining another coffee company. He recalls, "Doug called out of the blue moments before we were about to reply and was like, 'Hold the presses, fly to Chicago tomorrow'... We flew to Chicago, saw the Intelligentsia roasting works [and] thought there's no way we should be working anywhere but here."

Glanville joined Intelligentsia in 2006 and currently goes by Manager of Espresso Research Development. He finds all the coffees for the company's espresso and is currently planning the "design, functional elements and equipment concepts" for a new Intelligentsia coffee bar in Venice, which should open in November. He also trains the company's L.A. baristas and sources coffee in South America.

Glanville's coffee philosophy has changed drastically over the years. In Carmel, "It was about the milk and the flavorings. That's 180 degrees away from my approach to coffee now." Working for Intelligentsia has allowed Glanville to understand coffee holistically. He now believes, "Coffee is as infinitely complex as wine. From a purely chemical structure, much more so, and from a sort of socioeconomic and global business perspective, way more complex than wine."

He's also reversed his thinking about espresso. "[In Seattle], I remember thinking drip coffee or brewed coffee, long black coffee, is an abomination and espresso is the way to go. Now I feel almost the opposite. Espresso has such a long way to go, and drip coffee is where you have the real nuance."

Glanville first competed in barista championships in 2005, while working for Victrola. He says, "I thought my wicked technique on the coffee bar would automatically translate to the competition, which was not the case at all." At the Northwest Regional, he ended up getting his espresso tamper stuck in the basket of coffee grounds.

In 2007, he took Second at the Western Regional, "the hardest region in the world." He says, "I went to the U.S. Championship and was shocked to be in the finals and sort of realized, my god, I actually have a chance at winning this." He took Fifth. "I was pretty disappointed, but it also made me realize I could take the whole thing."

This year, Glanville took the whole thing, winning the U.S. Barista Championship in Minneapolis. His signature drink combined salted macadamia nuts, cracked green cardamom pods and brown sugar, toasted, stirred with heavy cream and strained into a martini glass with espresso. He then "topped it off with melted ice cream to add some texture and temperature dimension."

In June, he placed eighth at the World Championship in Copenhagen, missing the finals by only three points out of 1000. He admits, "I was way too safe... There was nothing I was really doing, aside from the way I was presenting my signature drink, that was innovative enough."

Glanville isn't sure yet if he'll defend his U.S. crown in 2009, saying, "It's really stressful, and I'm having a baby too." Glanville met the mother of his child, Deanna Mustard, thanks to coffee. "She was on the other side of the espresso machine" at Victrola. They've been together for five years and now work together at Intelligentsia, where she's a barista.

He plans to work with coffee until he retires, and may open a pizzeria or taproom. There's no chance he'll open his own coffeehouse, saying, "I would have to do it modestly, and I like doing bigger, grander, more interesting things." **NA**

INTELLIGENTISIA

3922 W. Sunset Blvd., Silver Lake, (323) 663-6173

PHOTOS BY JOSHUA LURIE

