Global Coffee Report

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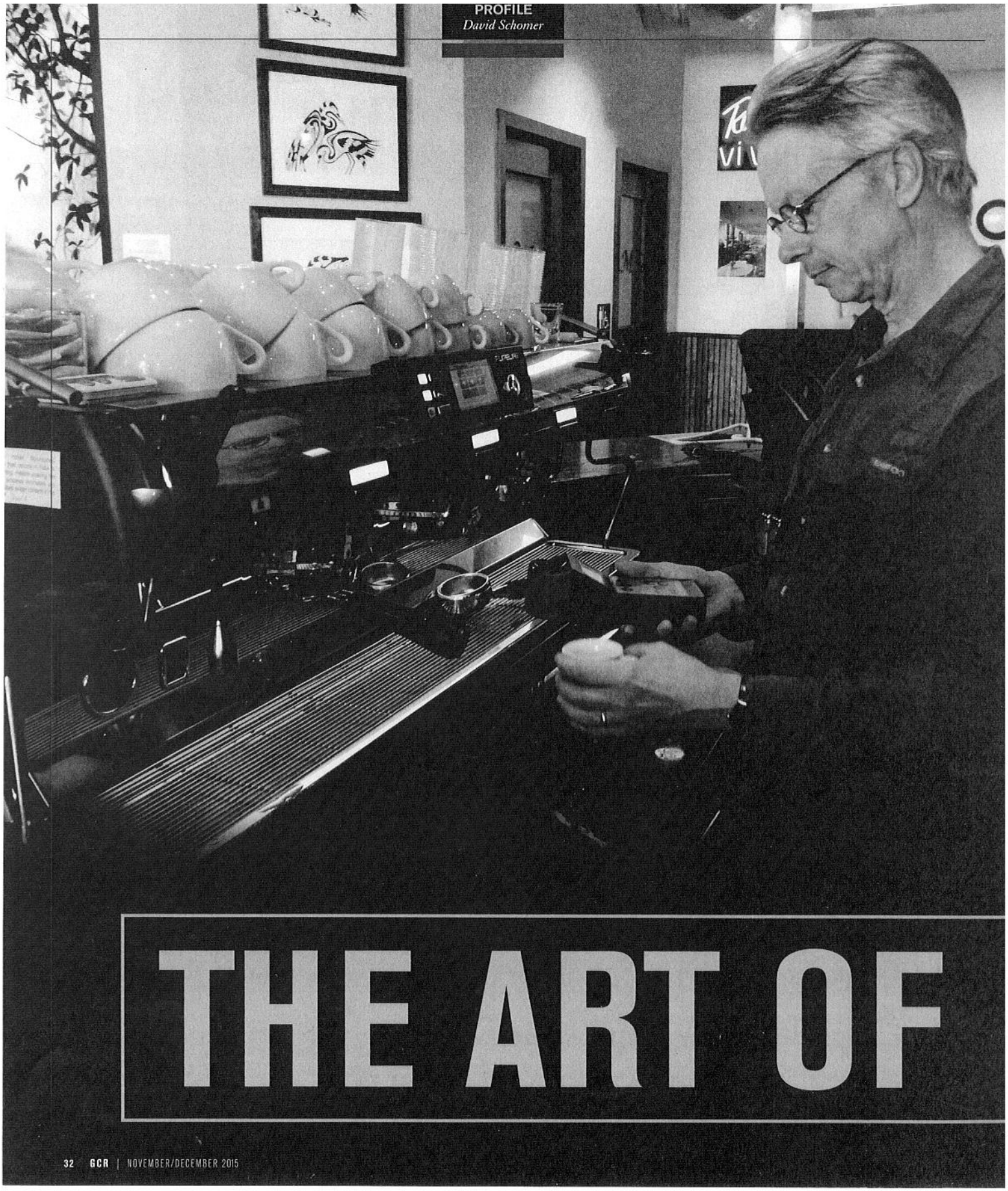

THE ART OF

DAVID SCHOMER'S ACCIDENTAL ARRIVAL ON THE COFFEE SCENE IN THE 1980S HAS LED TO A CAREER OF EXPERIMENTATION AND INNOVATION THAT HAS CHANGED THE WAY THE WORLD MAKES ESPRESSO.

PERFECTION

He is known variously as an accomplished flautist, an airforce-trained metrologist, and the mad scientist of espresso.

David Schomer's path to the coffee industry was indirect and, in many ways, purely accidental, so what is it that drives the man credited for inspiring the design of Nuova Simonelli's game-changing T3 technology?

According to Schomer himself, the answer is simple – a single-minded pursuit of beauty.

"Everything I do must have beauty in it ... particularly aromatics and sensual flavour experiences," Schomer tells *GCR Magazine*. "So once I had tasted that perfect coffee, I just couldn't resist trying to get people to make it well – it's just intoxicating to me."

While a literal reading of Schomer's coffee CV would turn up a Seattle-based espresso bar owner (Espresso Vivace) with a passion for writing about his favourite drink, the influence that Schomer has had on the industry he loves runs much deeper.

Having entered the coffee business as a way to make a stable living while indulging his musical passions as a flautist, Schomer soon discovered another passion that has consumed him since.

"Really my only claim to fame is absolute tenacity and fidelity to the idea that during my lifetime, espresso coffee should be known as a culinary art and that precision equipment should be brought to the fore so that we can capture the fragrance of the roasted coffee in a cup," he says.

It is his dedication to this goal that has seen Schomer work with some of the biggest names in the coffee industry, ultimately changing the way that technology was used in making espresso.

"Espresso is still a troublesome step-child that sometimes it's better to keep out of sight because, I hate to say, but most people still don't make it very well – it's an extremely technical pursuit," he says.

And it is the technology that Schomer has been tinkering with for the best part of the past three decades to try to make that troublesome step-child somewhat easier to manage.

When he first entered the industry, Schomer – who had worked as a precision measurement specialist for Boeing before pursuing a career in music and then coffee – was astonished to find that much of the technology being used was so imprecise.

"The Italians took a turn towards automation in the 1950s and 60s [because] they really concluded that espresso was just too hard to make and they tried automate the process and at the time the heat exchange machine was dominant and that was wildly inaccurate," he explains.

An early encounter with one of the coffee industry's heavyweights left Schomer with a lesson that would dictate his path over the coming decades.

"Sergio Michael at illycaffe told me in 1989 that each different temperature gives you a different coffee and I filed that away," Schomer says.

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With that bit of knowledge in mind, and an awareness of the lack of precision in the technology available to him at the time, Schomer set himself on his pursuit for perfection.

Working with John Blackwell from La Marzocco, Schomer experimented with different techniques to get more temperature stability from the machine.

This work included fixing the group head of the machine with an extended water delivery tube that would sit in what Schomer calls the "sweet spot" of the boiler, where the

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temperature of the water was at its most stable.

But still the results were not forthcoming.

"It was an intuition of mine that, after doing everything else that I could think of, the variation of the temperature that was built into the machine was an obstacle that I couldn't overcome," Schomer says.

In an attempt to break the deadlock, Schomer published the results of his experiments in the hope that it would inspire others to join him on his quest.

That was when John Bicht from Versalabs found Schomer and proposed using a PID (proportional integrative derivative) controller to regulate the temperature in the boiler.

"That was in 2001 and the machine worked beautifully," Schomer says.

"It included John Blackwell's group head, John Bicht helped to program the PID controller and stainless steel group heads without the brass – many little steps like that which were probably kind of tedious, but for me it was really exciting that the coffee finally tasted like the fragrance."

While at this point most people would be running off to the patent office to safeguard their discovery, this was not the way of coffee evangelist Schomer, who just wanted to see a machine like this put into production, but did not want to be the one who did it.

"I don't need to profit off machines," he says. "The real business in machines is after-market care for customers and I don't find that beautiful ... the only thing that I find beautiful is watching that coffee come out and training new people to do it, which I do every day and I deliberately size my business so that I'm never taken away from that."

So he published the results of his work and went on with his life.

Then, some 11 years later, Nuova Simonelli released its T3 technology, setting new standards for temperature stability and performance in espresso machines. And it seems that Schomer's work was at the root of it all.

"Gianni [Cassatini of Nuova Simonelli] approached me three years ago and said 'David, we did everything that you ever published to make the machine better'," Schomer says. "I was really surprised that an old Italian company would even pay any attention, but they said 'no, you were right every step of the way, and here's the proof'."

When Schomer was able to taste the results, he was convinced that Lauro Fioretti, Nuova Simonelli's chief engineer, had got it right.

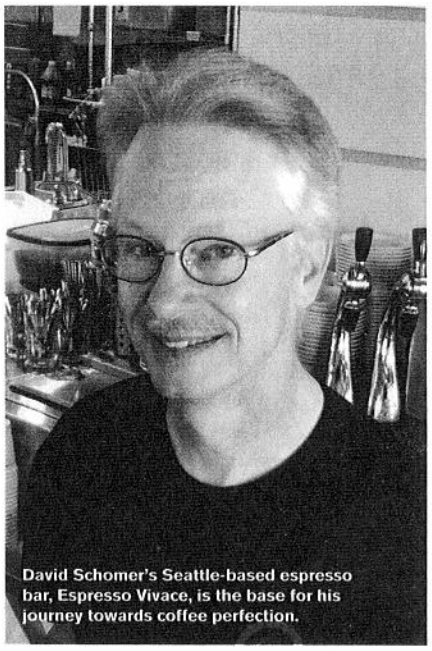
"Oh my goodness, that pour – it was a beautiful pour," he says.

With his vision for temperature stability in espresso machines realised, one would be forgiven for assuming that Schomer's experimentations in coffee were over.

But, ever the innovator, he has now shifted his focus to that other ubiquitous piece of espresso making machinery – the grinder.

"What the barista's doing is trying to make sure that the water is coming through the same, every time," he says. "You capture all of the flavours in the coffee only when the temperature is absolutely rock stable and the flow rate is 100 per cent in your control."

The main factor determining flow rate, Schomer says, is the consistency of the grind and the amount of coffee being dispensed each time.



David Schomer's Seattle-based espresso bar, Espresso Vivace, is the base for his journey towards coffee perfection.

He tells us of a new grinder designed by Kyle Anderson from Baratza that weighs the coffee as it comes out of the grinder, accurate to one tenth of a gram.

"So it gives us very superior dosage control, and dosage control equals flow rate control, which means you're capturing the flavours most thoroughly," he says.

But there is more to be done, and Schomer is agitating the big hitters to make the next step.

"The next thing I've gotta do is to sucker some machine company into this dream. It's round two and it's the grinder this time," he says.

"I'm trying to bug Lauro at Nuova Simonelli to make a conical burr grinder, but so far they're doing a good job of ignoring me," he adds with a laugh.

But in the meantime one gets the impression that Schomer will happily continue doing what he loves to do – capturing the alluring aroma of roasted coffee and turning it into something that people can taste.

"I am doing exactly what I want to do, and that is making a lot of coffee and testing a lot of coffee, training people every day, watching that beautiful stuff come out and watching people say 'oh my god, that's the best thing I've ever had' – that's why I'm doing it." **GCR**