

Erin Sampson on her way to Colombia

Erin Sampson: Is this Australia's most awarded female barista? Since starting her coffee career five years ago, Erin Sampson has been on an upward trajectory in this small but fast-evolving industry known as specialty coffee, having successfully represented Victoria and Australia in numerous barista and latte art competitions. From her early days as a casual barista at Flinders Street Station to her current role as customer relations manager at Veneziano Coffee, a Melbourne coffee roaster, Erin has been fortunate enough to be riding the third wave of coffee and taking every opportunity it has offered. Not only has Erin been competing in many of the barista competitions and doing very well, she has also found that it enables her to travel and explore the world at the same time. Winning the Australian Latte Art championship in 2009 meant she won a trip to Germany to compete as Australia's representative in the world competition. As Erin says, "I have been fortunate that my boss and I have the same philosophy on coffee; the more you know the better you will be. This view is shared throughout the company with everyone being offered the chance to compete in competitions, participate in industry developments and training as well as travel to countries of coffee origin." Erin's Colombia and Panama visit coincides with the World Barista Championship 2011. Erin is certainly the poster girl for this point of view. During her relatively short time in the industry, Erin has travelled to Japan, Europe and the UK. This year, as part of her second placing in the 2011 Australian Barista Championship, after her short visit to Stumptown Coffee Roasters in Manhattan, New York, she is flying out to Bogota, Colombia to assist the 2011 winner Matt Perger in his preparations for the world competition. Whilst in South America, Erin will fly to Panama to visit the Hartmann's coffee plantation, to see the coffee she used in the competition growing on the bush and hopefully taste this year's crop so she can get a head start on her coffees for this year's competition. Last year she flew to London to watch the 2010 World Barista Championship as a part of her preparation for 2011 and was able to explore emerging coffee trends at the trade show held at the same time. Erin saw a great deal of filter coffee at the trade show and she used a filter coffee in her presentation to show the judges the differences between brewing methods. Visiting on behalf of Veneziano, Erin was impressed by the growth of the competition and the emergence of filter coffees in a competition that until now has focused on espresso coffee. As Erin says, "From fairly humble beginnings 11 years ago, the WBC now has over 50 countries entering every year. The competition just goes from strength to strength and that can only be good for specialty coffee all over the world."

About Erin Sampson's barista career Before her barista career took off, Erin had a strong case of travel bug and spent four years travelling Europe and New Zealand. Just like most people who've travelled extensively, Erin loves to jump on a plane and explore the world and her barista skills have since given her the perfect way to combine her two great loves. Upon returning to the 'real' world Erin couldn't decide what she wanted to do, and not yet knowing what her real strengths were, she opted for hospitality and started working in a caf. This was her first introduction to the art of coffee making, and now with a number of years experience behind her, Erin says, "...looking back, my first experience was not great!" Erin's next job happened to be with a Veneziano customer, Coffee HQ, which meant being trained by Veneziano's baristas. It was through this exposure to Veneziano and their commitment to providing customers with a quality coffee experience, that Erin very quickly became addicted to the whole specialty coffee industry, igniting an insatiable desire to learn all she could.

The next important milestone in Erin's career happened in 2007. This was her first ever participation in a barista competition, which just so happened to be the AASCA Victorian heats, in which she placed second – and only to David Makin (who went on to represent Australia in the World competition). She hasn't stopped competing since. It was not long after this she opened her own caf, Primary, in Parkville, Melbourne. The long hours involved in running her own business meant she had to take a step back from competing in the barista competitions, which is how she discovered latte art. This newer form of competition highlights the barista's skill in producing free pour art on the top of the cup. This was a timely discovery of her artistic talents. Erin spent weeks practicing just one pattern to perfect it! She has done very well for herself in the latte art category, culminating in her becoming the Australian Latte Art Champion and then going on to third place in the world championships in 2009.

Erin on coffee's future Erin's current role involves client liaison, training and development of clients' barista teams, nurturing new barista competition talent, helping to create new coffee blends, exploring other ways of brewing coffee and introducing these to the caf environment as well as keeping on top of industry trends. Erin goes on to say, "The Veneziano client must be able to offer what more sophisticated customers have been demanding; more information about the coffee they are drinking. And this goes beyond the so-called Fairtrade and organic coffees. "I am now asked a lot of questions that just wouldn't have been heard of even two years ago, such as; where is my coffee from? What harvesting and processing methods were used? How old were the green beans before they were roasted? Does the farmer earn a decent wage for the product he sells? Are the farming practices sustainable? She adds, "And, now we are finding that customers are on the cusp of wanting to know what the different coffee growing regions can bring to the flavour we find in the cup", and she continues that, "I have a friend in the wine industry who says 'it sounds like our industry about 30 years ago' so who knows how far coffee can go?" One thing is certain; Erin will most certainly be a part of coffee's future.

Erin's Coffee accomplishments to date:

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| 2007 | AASCA Barista Championship (Victoria) | 2nd |
| 2007 | AASCA Australian Barista Championship Open Heats | 2nd |
| 2008 | AASCA Vic Latte Art Championship | 1st |
| 2009 | AASCA Latte Art Championship (Victoria) | 1st |
| 2009 | AASCA Australian Latte Art Championship | 1st |
| 2009 | World Latte Art Championship (Germany) | 3rd |
| 2010 | Danes Grand Barista Championship (Victoria) | 1st |
| 2010 | Danes Grand Barista Championship (Australia) | 3rd |
| 2011 | AASCA Barista Championship (Victoria) | 3rd |
| 2011 | AASCA Australian Barista Championship | |

2ndWe look forward to brining you Erin's South American visit as we receive updates. Additional information: Veneziano Coffee - specialty roasters, supporter of certified organic and certified Fairtrade coffee, supporter of direct trade and with producers and cooperatives, onsite world class barista training school, First Pour cafs, home of Australian barista and latte art champions, recipient of countless awards, and proud supplier to over 500 of Australia's best cafes. Roasteries located: 22 Bond Street Abbotsford, VIC and Montague Rd, West End, QLD.

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