

## The Roasting Plant's Coffee Beans Dance Overhead

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Coffee missiles, armed and ready.

*Photo: RJ Mickelson/Veras for New York Magazine*

In the increasingly competitive coffee-shop market, savvy independents keep searching for ways to trounce the Seattle Goliath. Some turn to rock-star baristas, others to the sanctity of their politically correct, sustainably grown beans. Roasting Plant, which opened last week on the Lower East Side, relies on new technology and Wonka-esque spectacle.

Founder Mike Caswell, an engineer and a veteran of the Coffee Connection and Starbucks (where he held the Orwellian title of “director of profit improvement”), spent five years developing a system that would emphasize freshness, a crucial, if often ignored, requirement for great-tasting coffee. Roasting Plant’s goal, according to Caswell, is to minimize the time and distance between roasting, grinding, brewing, and drinking. Think of it as bean-to-cup coffee brewed on demand: Green beans are roasted on-site, then piped through polycarbonate ceiling tubing into storage receptacles. To order, you first select among seven choices, and when your order is entered into the computer, the chosen beans are sent clattering through overhead pipes and into the custom-modified super-automated Egro espresso machine, where they’re ground and brewed. Cutting-edge technology aside, familiar coffee-shop trappings include Tom Cat Bakery pastries and free wi-fi. —*Rob Patronite and Robin Raisfeld*

*Roasting Plant, 81 Orchard St., nr. Broome St.; 212-775-7755*