

Coffee Worth the Wait

The Washington Post

August 20, 2003

In a world where bedheads can program coffee to brew while they sleep and commuters chug triple espressos from paper cups, coffee has become all expectation, no anticipation.

Except, perhaps, for the cold, iced ca phe sua da.

The sweetly satiating iced latte of sorts from Southeast Asia is comprised of two contrasting components: two parts strongly brewed coffee rich with chicory overtones and one part sweetened condensed milk (not evaporated milk).

Chicory first gained prominence during the French Revolution for its ability to stretch the coffee supply and temper the bitter edge of dark-roast coffee. Shortly thereafter, France extended its chicory- swilling influence to colonies abroad, notably Louisiana and Southeast Asia. Later New Orleans made famous the traditional cafe au lait, while Vietnam created its tropical rendition from a shelf-stable source of dairy.

Though it can easily be made from any strongly brewed coffee, the most robust ca phe sua da is slowly brewed using an individual stainless-steel filter set over a cup containing a considerable puddle of sweetened condensed milk and ice. Two heaping tablespoons of grounds are placed in the filter, the strainer is screwed into place and not-quite-boiling water is poured into the filter.

And that's when anticipation comes into play.

It takes nearly a quarter hour for the drops of full-flavored brew to slowly dribble into the cup and mingle with the sweet milk. And worth every second of patience mustered.

Coffee and chicory blends such as Cafe du Monde can be found at many Asian supermarkets for as little as \$2.99 per can and at some grocery and specialty stores for up to \$9.99 per 15-ounce can.

Individual coffee filters are available for about \$2.99 at Asian supermarkets.

Ca phe sua da is available at most Vietnamese cafes and restaurants.