

## 16 Espresso Coffee

Grinding deserves a whole chapter (see Chapter 5). Connoisseurs believe that in order to be excellent, the beans should only be ground immediately prior to preparation; unfortunately, it is difficult to find and take care of top quality household grinders. This is why 90% of packaged coffee sold in retail shops is ground. The most promising solution for the future is servings – ground and pressed doses of coffee, sealed in a wrapper and ready for use. Servings offer the fastest, cleanest way of preparing espressos, and, most importantly, they guarantee a consistency of quality that neither coffee beans nor ground coffee can in any way guarantee due to the serious problems in keeping all the parameters involved in preparing a perfect espresso cup under control.

Espresso consumption is an aesthetic experience, like tasting a vintage wine or admiring a painting. It is a search for beauty and goodness for improving the quality of our life. As it offers such subjectively ineffable ‘goodness’, devoid of defects, the only adequate reaction to it is astonishment – astonishment that can give birth to enthusiasm, and therefore intellectual and spiritual enrichment.

The predominance of the experience aspect means that the official definition of quality may be limited for espresso. It may be more appropriate to speak of ‘degree of excellence’. The elements characterising effective quality are the subject of this book and will be revealed in detail as you read. From an organoleptic point of view, we have already seen the importance of the aroma and the full-body – to a certain extent represented by the visual component of the cream – while, as regards the taste, consumers look for a slight bitterness in southern countries or a slight acidity in northern countries, in both cases accompanied by the characteristic sweetness of the coffee. On the opposite side, the most common, serious defects penalising consumption are the extreme bitterness and foul flavour of poor quality beans.

### **1.7 DEFINITION OF ESPRESSO**

Everyone in Italy has a clear mental picture of a cup of espresso: a small heavy china cup with a capacity just over 50 ml, half full with a dark brew topped by a thick layer of a reddish-brown foam of tiny bubbles. More than 50 million cups of espresso are consumed every day in the world: its fragrance and flavour are the first stimuli in the morning, they crown an excellent meal later in the day, and act as frequent revivers during lengthy working sessions.