



# Bringing the revolution in coffee into your home

Having worked for the company which pioneered the Starbucks concept in Britain, Kate Peers now markets clever coffee pods

**G**rowing up in Seattle, Kate Peers witnessed the birth of the coffee revolution.

Thirty years ago, the city's thriving rock scene and tech-based industry helped fuel demand for a European-style café culture, a need enthusiastically met by local company Starbucks.

"I got a love for coffee in my late teens. I remember my first latte thinking, 'Ah, this is what it's all about,'" says the Highgate resident.

"The late Eighties was an exciting time in Seattle. It was really vibrant and burgeoning, and Starbucks started opening extensively, creating this ritual of a coffee shop as a place between home and work where people got together and chatted."

When she came to England, Peers – and her friends – realised there was an opportunity in the UK market.

"When I came to London I missed my lattes and my best friend's sister wrote to Starbucks telling them to open over here."

The reply came back that the UK was not part of their growth strategy, so the friend's sister started the Seattle Coffee Company, modelled on the Starbucks concept.

## Worked as a barista

That was 1995, and Peers worked as a barista in the original Covent Garden store before managing the Canary Wharf outlet, then joining the marketing team.

"This company was exciting and dynamic. A lot of care went into the coffee, the shops were colourful places and the service was great. We went from one to 63 stores in three years. Then Starbucks bought it out. They gave the company a lot of credit for introducing the concept of speciality coffees to the UK as an everyday luxury."

Peers stayed on and launched



■ **Kate Peers**

Pictures: Alicia Clarke

Starbucks in the UK. Now with three young children, the 40-year-old is working part-time as marketing director of CafePod – bringing coffee "back home" by selling Nespresso-compatible capsules in supermarkets.

"What's exciting is coffee's come full circle in recent years. It's part of people's daily lives, they've

grown to appreciate it and want to have it at their fingertips at home."

The easy-to-use machines – drop a pod in the top then press a button to get an espresso – have taken off in recent years with a 31 per cent rise in sales.

CafePod spotted an opportunity to sell the pods in supermarkets rather than ordering then online.

"There's a growing demand for these machines because it's very easy to get fantastic coffee."

"Home espresso machines often gather dust and can be quite difficult to use and to clean."

"The beauty of these pod machines is they are really easy to use. We're allowing people to pick up pods with their weekly shop, and the coffee is a phenomenally high-quality delicious blend."

CafePod costs £2.75 per 10-pack, available at Waitrose, Morrisons and Ocado, with five types ranging from smooth to super strong ristretto.

# No starters, no puds, no cheese – no wonder I still felt hungry

The café's artisanal ambiance leaves our reviewer cold and, what's worse, the menu's meagre offerings mean he fails to eat his fill

**A**nd so during this rather glorious summer of 2013 that just kept on giving, my wife and son went to the rapturously reviewed production of *The Sound of Music* at the Open Air Theatre in Regent's Park. They were blessed by yet another warm and balmy mellow evening, and enjoyed the thing immensely. Along the way, they were stunned as well by the profusion of flowerbeds – steeply banked clusters of various pinks and burgundies, dramatically offset by jet black leaves and the rather startling spatter of blood red busy lizzies. Well I just had to

see all of that for myself, so the following week (another, yet one more, hot and sunny day) my wife thought she'd give me a guided tour. It's such a fabulous park, I think, because it's timeless: hasn't changed since I remember it in the 1960s. The boats on the meandering lake, the heartbreaking beauty of the weeping willows, dipping into the water, the elegant filigree of the bandstand ... together with, these days, the gabble all around you of every language save our own. Ah well. The park seems to be particularly favoured by ladies very heavily obscured by, if not the yashmak or the complete and utter burqa, then certainly

“My eggs Benedict was that fashionable thing: deconstructed. It's like you order a cheese sandwich, OK, and here's the cheddar, here are the slices of bread and so off you go and just see how it takes you to make it your bloody self...

## Top-notch producer's organic tea 'is like single estate malt whisky'

**T**he explosion in coffee consumption hasn't stalled the growth of specialist producer Hampstead Tea.

The company's bags and loose leaf organic teas from a single estate in Darjeeling have benefited from a different social trend – the desire to know where food comes from.

Kiran Tawadey started the company in 1995 on the kitchen table of her Hampstead home.

"It was a cottage industry, small scale, without any fancy market research. I was passionate about tea and was in contact with Rajah Banerjee who owned a tea estate that's been in his family for three generations and was ahead of its time in going organic."

Kiran started as a broker, selling Rajah's tea in bulk to Germany.

"I had two young children, including a son with a really bad food allergy, so I got interested in food and how it was produced. When I met Rajah he talked about the use of artificial pesticides, how people were using DDT, which was banned in the West, and all the toxins in the soil. But in those days there was no organic certification."

Kiran, who grew up near Kochi in India, said Rajah's Makaihari estate is "the most beautiful, lush amazing place to visit".

It was first certified organic, then became the world's first certified biodynamic estate, and is run on sustainable lines, with the



■ **The CafePod capsules**

## Joseph Connolly at Natural Kitchen



■ Joseph Connolly at Natural Kitchen in Marylebone High Street

the jauntier hijab – which, due to the uniform addition of vast and black designer sunglasses (Chanel and Prada appeared to be favourites) still leaves only their noses to twitch in the sun. They laugh quite happily, and take it in turns to pose for photographs in front of the babbling fountain. One imagines them later at home: “That’s a really good one of you!” “You think so? Oh no ... it’s you, actually.” “Is it? Is it really? Are you sure? You know – looking at it again, I actually think it’s got to be Fatima...”

### Artfully distressed

Anyhoo ... following that walk, and baked by the sun, what am I in quest of, do you think? Yes indeed: right first time – lunch, of course, lunch, what else? And nearby Marylebone, it never lets

me down: just when I feel sure that I have covered every single restaurant, up pop another few. And so it was: Natural Kitchen, the name of the place pretty neatly summing up its entire intent: here is basic, here is fresh, here is artisanal. Because new restaurants these days simply have to fall into one of two schools: the wilfully glitzy, and the artfully distressed. Unless, of course, the proprietors fall prey to gentle schizophrenia, as seems to be the case with Gordon Ramsay who has just opened a restaurant in Southwark – and just listen to how it is described in the press release: “a high-end urban warehouse destination”. Christ above: sounds more like an overpriced storage facility in an inner-city slum than any sort of eating place, but there you go.

On the ground floor of Natural Kitchen is a large and bustling deli. Tiles and bleached wood: a tremendous butcher, but very so-so charcuterie and so on, and an utterly lamentable cheese selection (maybe because just a few doors away is La Fromagerie, one of London’s very finest). Because here is demonstrably “real” and “casual” and “of the people”, it is difficult to tell whether this is the sort of place that Jamie Oliver recently was urging working-class folk to patronise, or shun. Because despite his having trousered 11 million quid for having been the intensely irritating face of Sainsbury’s, he says that people on a limited budget should eschew the supermarkets in favour of “real” food elsewhere. He imagines that following a hard day’s grind, or else job-hunting, the salt of

the earth are going to crush some garlic in a skillet and then get busy with the linguine. But they’re not. What they’re going to do is get 40 fish fingers for £2 at Iceland and stick them between wedges of processed bread. Or have a MacDonald’s.

### Communal tables

By the window are a couple of communal tables (a thing quite guaranteed to strike dread in the breast of any Englishman) and towards the rear, a couple more ... downstairs is a “homewares” department (hessian, wicker, rusting metal, painted wood distressed to the point of anguish ... nothing that need alarm the Conran Shop opposite), while upstairs is the café proper. I won’t describe the décor because, predictably, there isn’t any: white, and raw wood – got it? The waitresses wear butcher’s aprons and present you with the menu attached to a clipboard so very fondly similar to the one which so frequently on our screens the late great David Frost would clutch to his bosom while bidding us, “Thank you kindly, good evening, and welcome,” There is an “all-day brunch” – but don’t get too excited because the place closes at 4pm. Then there are “rustic artisan sandwiches” (for which read: too damn thick to fit into your mouth) and various salads. No starters. So my wife had chicken escalope with a beetroot salad and a rocket salad, and I ordered eggs Benedict – which I hadn’t had in ages. And some black olives. The chicken was crunchily breadcrumb, too chunky and very dry. The salads seemed very heavy-handed and almost deliberately ugly, but all the ingredients (beetroot, pear, walnuts, tomato, apple, rocket, fennel, celery) were undeniably fresh.

My eggs Benedict was that fashionable thing: deconstructed. Why would you do that? Two very well poached eggs in good, but sparing, hollandaise, alongside some English ham, some prosciutto and two bits of toast. It’s like you order a cheese sandwich, OK, and here’s the cheddar, here

are the slices of bread and so off you go and just see how long it takes you to make it your bloody self...! Ham was great ... but as lunches go, it was all very meagre. Olives first rate ... we took most of them home in a very sweetly wrapped carton.

And I was hungry. The waitress said: “Would you like anything else?” and I said: “Is there anything else?” and she said: “No, not really...” “Cheese...?” I prompted. “No, not really...” “Not really...?” “Well no. None at all, actually. We’ve got poppy seed cake...” So I asked for the bill. Took ages. Thought she’d popped off for an early night. Then it arrived, inserted into an old cookery book. “It’s what we do. You can’t keep it, or anything...” Earlier, it had been my firm intention to walk off my lunch – but I had managed that by the time I was half way down the stairs. So we went back to the park: bought us each a scoop of ice cream from a jaunty kiosk: £4.80. Which, back in the 1960s, was the weekly rent on a large studio with kitchenette in Belsize Park – so not everything about Regent’s Park is as timeless as all that...

■ Joseph Connolly’s latest novel, *England’s Lane*, is now available in paperback (Quercus £8.99). All previous restaurant reviews may be viewed on the website [www.josephconnolly.co.uk](http://www.josephconnolly.co.uk).

## FACTFILE

### ■ NATURAL KITCHEN

77-78 Marylebone High Street W1.  
Tel: 020 3012 2123

■ Open Monday-Friday, 8am-4pm, Saturday-Sunday, 8am-5pm. Lunch served from 11am ... but it’s not much different from everything else they serve.

■ Food: ★★★★★☆☆☆☆

■ Service: ★★★★★☆☆☆☆

■ The Feeling: ★★★★★☆☆☆☆

■ Cost: Cheapish ... two people will be fine for £30 with a drink. But they don’t do starters, and they don’t do puddings. Which just isn’t natural.



■ Kiran Tawadey, director of Hampstead Tea  
Picture: Tom Pilston

crop picked by hand and rolled and fermented traditionally.

“As a broker, I had no control over the end product. The tea would be blended with other teas, so in 1995 we went into business packaging our own product and it’s grown

and grown. People have a better understanding of where things come from and how they are made. This is not a PG Tips, blended to a consistent taste, it’s like a single estate malt whisky.”

Despite the convenience of tea

bags, the demand for loose leaf tea has grown in recent years.

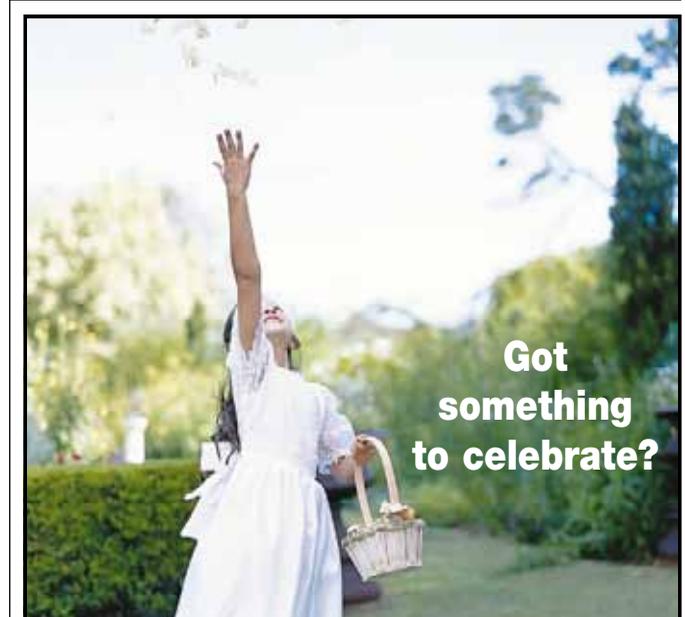
“Once they’ve taken the step and had loose tea, they never go back. The taste is so much better because it’s the prime product, made from the tips of the plant, whereas tea bags are made from dust – although not ours, Rajah says it’s not fit for drinking and puts it on his roses.”

Iced tea has also taken off with ready made drinks doing well in Tesco and a wider range available via Ocado.

Kiran, who favours the loose leaf Darjeeling, adds: “People say coffee is huge and hats off to those people, they’ve done a great job making it really sexy, but people still love tea. It’s so nice and comforting. The caffeine is released slowly, so it’s more soothing with fewer after-effects than a strong coffee.”

“It’s full of antioxidants and if it’s a good tea you shouldn’t need to drink it with lots of sugar or milk.”

■ [www.hampsteadtea.com](http://www.hampsteadtea.com)



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