



A breath of fresh air

Coffee roasters and tea blenders for more than 30 years, Sussex-based Edgcumbes recently expanded its popular retail business into a fully fledged cafe and the locals are flocking. Editor Jennie Milsom heads to the country

The Edge Café and Sussex Food Academy

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edgcumbes.co.uk



My senses are on high alert from the very moment I arrive in the leafy lane outside Edgcumbes and the sweet farmyard smells can mean only one thing: this is country territory – but one with a difference. Around the corner, nearing the converted farm buildings, I'm hit with the unmistakable aroma of coffee being roasted. A few steps further, through an open door that leads into the coffee shop, the heady scent of freshly roasted coffee fills the room. As customers slip away, clutching coffees to cars or tables, more people wander in and join the queue. With steam wands hissing, the patter of beans being tipped into hoppers and grinders whirring, it's welcoming on so many levels. I've entered a secret oasis of fresh flavours.

It's lovely to witness such a vibrant cafe scene in an utterly secluded location nestled among birdsong and fields, two miles from the nearest town, Arundel. It's the very definition of destination. As well as tables inside, there's an outdoor seating area between the coffee shop and the roastery (a former barn), which turns out around half a tonne a week of roasted coffee for its wholesale and retail business. Another doorway from the cafe leads to its Sussex Food Academy, where Edgcumbes hosts workshops from cheese tasting to truffle making. A long wooden-topped table

runs through the room and doubles as a prep area for the cafe.

For Edgcumbes' owners, Alice and Chris Rendle, freshness is at the heart of their long-established wholesale and burgeoning retail operation and it's hard to believe that, earlier this year, this cafe didn't exist. In 2015, to showcase their freshly roasted coffee and loose-leaf teas, they opened a small takeaway in a corner of the roastery. Locals loved the concept of coffee straight from the roaster and the takeaway soon outgrew the space. So the Rendles converted some of the farm buildings opposite into a larger cafe space and launched this spring with an expanded menu. "Retail was a big step," says Alice. "Merging the >





RURAL WINS

● **Recruit and train people who share your values**, are passionate about coffee and who enjoy getting to know customers.

● **As well as first-class customer service**, your product must be outstanding – it's what you need to be famous for.

● **Define your point of difference** – be more than a cafe serving great food. Customers want the whole experience and to feel empowered and educated.

● **Identify and understand your core values**. Be open and honest about them with your customers and team and work them into everything you do.

● **Start with the customer**. For Edgumbes, expanding its cafe operation was a natural step towards addressing customer needs.

● **Be open for everyone and don't assume people know anything**. Being too flash can alienate.



two strands was a challenge. The margins can be huge but education takes time. We're opening specialty coffee to all people." Retail operations manager Paul Lightfoot agrees, "We wanted to create a community open to everyone. It's about diversity and inclusion. We do vegan and gluten-free options. We're dog-friendly. We're saying: 'You're welcome.'" Lightfoot, a former retail consultant who lived in Sydney for five years, was an Edgumbes customer before he joined the team. "The challenge is getting close enough to the detail – making sure we're not running too fast and that we keep coming back to the customer," he says. They originally thought they would cope without management but, after six weeks, realised they'd need to recruit.

Customers are locals who detour on their morning commute for a quick sit-in coffee or takeaway, and cyclists and residents from nearby villages. "Customers' expectations and habits are changing," says Lightfoot. "There's no nine-to-five any more. People eat on the go, 24/7." For the busy 7.30am-9am

slot, along with coffee, it's all about toasties, filled croissants and bacon sandwiches. A super-fast counter-top oven – a Merrychef – transforms sandwiches to melting and golden in under a minute, minimising waiting times. "We're seeing new people all the time," says Paul. "Most are word of mouth. Our core customers are very loyal."

Edgumbes' other new ventures include a refurbished coffee van in nearby Chichester's Draper's Yard, and The Brewhouse Project, where they are joining forces with Arundel Brewery to transform a former farm shop into a cafe and bar serving craft beer, coffees and excellent food (probably wood-fired pizzas) by the end of the summer. "We have three central beliefs: freshness, being open for everyone and sharing our knowledge," says Alice. "We hope our new spaces will be a great way for customers to enjoy the wonderful world of food and drink."



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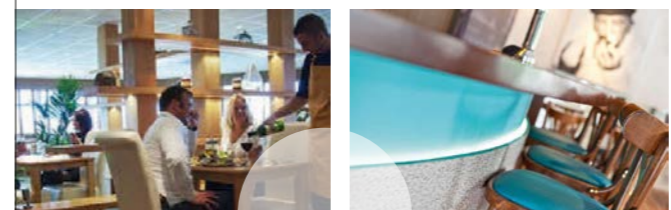


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