

## FEATURE



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### Crema's amazing espresso machine

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BY CHRISTIE LEE October 06, 2010 16:10

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Forget flavour shots, Crema's Geoff Polci is putting some old-word romance back into your espresso. Part of the fun of visiting his newest location at 53 Bloor E. is watching the baristas pull shots – quite literally – from the levers of Polci's Jetsons-esque Mirage

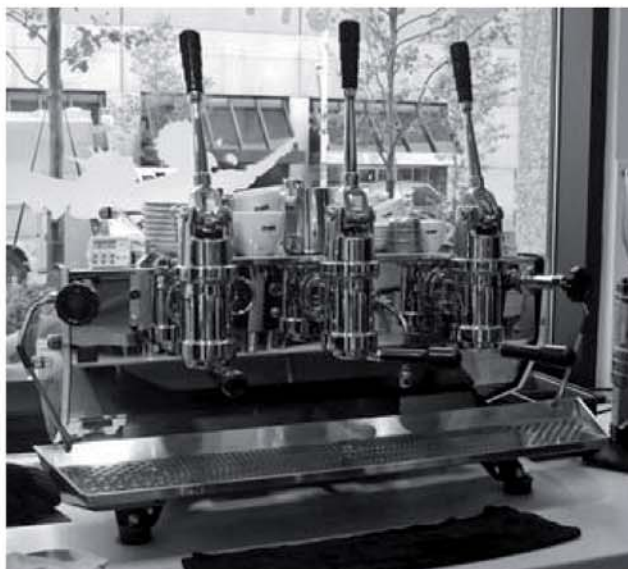
Triplet Idrocompresso. Here's the story behind this \$18,000 retro-modern marvel.

#### A little history

At one point, lever-operated espresso machines were all the rage in Italian cafés and baristas, having pulled each shot by hand, would develop an emotional attachment to their machines. The arrival of automatic pump-driven machines in the 1960s – which were easier and faster to operate – relegated the levers to quaint obsolescence.

#### Going dutch

The Mirage line of machines was actually designed by a Netherlands native, Kees van der Westen, who made a name for himself in the 1980s by taking apart old Italian machines and rebuilding them from scratch. Equal parts art and science, Westen's machines have garnered a cult following.



**Lever vs. pump**

One-touch pump-driven machines take much of the guesswork out of espresso – and the skill. The Idrocompresso requires baristas to physically pull the shots; by holding the lever in the down position, they control the amount of water that saturates the coffee. Crema's baristas know to hold the lever for about 10 seconds before letting go.

**The brass tack**

The Idrocompresso's inner cylinders are made of brass, a material that absorbs heat and cools the water as it passes through the grounds. As well, once the barista releases the lever, the water pressure slowly drops, from nine bars to zero. The gentler extraction results in a creamier crema, a higher concentration of flavourful oils and fats and the buttery mouth feel Crema fans love.

**Putting his foot down**

Polci did insist on one modification to the design: the addition of a foot pedal to operate the steam wands. While this gives baristas a free hand to adjust the strength of the steam, there's another, more basic reason that Polci loves the foot pedal: "It's more fun."