

The Washington Post

Food

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 1, 2014

MG VA PG

WINE

Why not?

Contrary to popular belief, Riesling is fine to drink year-round, and it's particularly appropriate for Oktoberfest celebrations. **E7**



Caper-showered sauteed fluke circled with a garland of crumbled cauliflower, dandelion tendrils and grape slivers is an elegant tribute to the Chesapeake."

Tom Sietsema's First Bite of DBGB Kitchen and Bar. **E3**

CHAT We answer questions at noon today: live.washingtonpost.com

SHOPPING CART

Two to try

Thin fruit crisps can take the place of crackers; and one company's cheese grows on trees. **E2**



MORE RECIPES Foolproof Salmon Baked With Olive Oil and Herbs **E2** Ginger Falafel With Wasabi Cream **E3** Spaghetti Frittata With Artichokes and Sun-Dried Tomatoes **E8**, PLUS MORE AT WASHINGTONPOST.COM/RECIPES



PHOTOS BY MELINA MARA/THE WASHINGTON POST

From platoon to pour-over

How a pair of ex-Marines came to roast and brew coffee in Shaw

BY MAURA JUDKIS

When Michael Haft and Harrison Suarez were in the Marines, they ate and drank quickly. In Afghanistan, they could wolf down a meal in eight minutes. But after their tour ended in 2011, and they left the military, Haft made a peculiar New Year's resolution: "Chew slowly."

Chewing slowly was not just about food; it was about living purposefully. Haft made the resolution just as he and Suarez were figuring out what to do with their civilian lives. They could have returned to the careers they'd tried on before the

Marines — finance for Haft, politics for Suarez — or taken a contractor or lobbyist position. Instead, they self-published an e-book about the beverage that had fueled them through the four-year commitment: "Perfect Coffee at Home."

Haft and Suarez have chewed slowly since then — and the ensuing year and a half has been quite a feast, as the book led to them to start their own business. Last week, the night before the opening of Compass Coffee, their new Shaw shop and roastery, they stacked the shelves with tins of their signature beans and reflected on how far they'd come.

"Everything in our lives leads up to this," said Suarez.

The metaphor is too easy: They found their direction with Compass.

COMPASS COFFEE CONTINUED ON **E4**

Above, clockwise from top: Customers arrive on the official opening day of Compass Coffee in the District's Shaw neighborhood; coffee roaster Brandon Warner works long hours to produce bags of roasted beans; barista Brittany Pugh waits while a customer's coffee brews. Right: Michael Haft, at left, and Harrison Suarez huddle on opening day, the culmination of 1½ years of planning and preparation.



Ambivalent about bay? When in doubt, don't leaf it out.

BY BONNIE S. BENWICK

It sounds like the stuff of urban food myths, except the story's true: Wife simmers a pot of spaghetti sauce with a dried bay leaf in it. She neglects to extract the brittle herb before dinner is served. Husband swallows the leaf and chokes on it, prompting a 911 call. (He survives; eventually, the marriage does not.)

"Gosh, it must have been 38 years ago, but it's not something you forget!" says Connecticut resident Ellyn Broden, who was living in Laurel, Md., at the time and had to take care of her neighbors' children when their mother (the cook) and father (bay leaf victim) were whisked to the emergency room.

6 tips

For storing and using bay leaves

E6

Bay leaves do not typically incite drama. In fact, the dried kind are dull green and inspire no agreed-upon description. Ask a home cook, and he or she might say a bay leaf is added for flavor, or as an aromatic. Others say, sure, they toss a bay leaf in when a recipe calls for it, but they can't tell you why. The leaves have been described as "earthy," "floral," "minty," "like cinnamon spice," "subtle"

BAY LEAF CONTINUED ON **E6**



DEB LINDSEY FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

RECIPES • Chocolate Pudding With Bay **E8** • Bay Leaf Rub **E8** • Twisty Rye Breadsticks **E8**

UNEARTHED

Why we worry about patenting the foods we eat

BY TAMAR HASPEL
Special to The Washington Post

If you're at the right party — a party populated by agriculture wonks — the issue of patenting living organisms might get more of a rise than either religion or politics, demonstrating both that patenting is a hot issue and that agriculture wonks aren't much of a hit at parties (trust me on this one).

A 1980 Supreme Court decision that allowed patents to be granted to living things kicked off the controversy. The basic genetic materials of the things we eat have been around, and have been tinkered with, for millennia, and the idea that a new version of one of them could earn protection that would prevent farmers from saving seed and, perhaps, give the patent holder inordinate control over our food supply has raised a number of concerns. I'm going to tackle the ones that seem to worry people most.

The first is that patents allow patent holders to restrict research, and that's true, although many of the restrictions arise from the contract that farmers sign in order to buy the seed rather than from the patent itself. Monsanto, for

UNEARTHED CONTINUED ON **E6**



PHOTOS BY MELINA MARA/THE WASHINGTON POST

Clockwise from top left: On Compass Coffee's first official day of business, the brown paper covering has finally come off the front windows; barista Brittany Pugh prepares a latte; customers Addie Thompson and Danny Metcalf share a hug; Alex Parker, the shop's assistant manager, scrutinizes a brew; sweets prepared by baker Laura Saltzman are ready to sell.



COMPASS COFFEE FROM E4

try, but it was their Marine Corps training that helped them stay the course. The petty frustration of spending days in the lobby of the Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs is nothing compared with sweeping an area to check for improvised explosive devices, after all. Once they began to hire a staff, they felt like leaders again.

"I hate to bring everything back to the military, but we were leading a platoon. . . . Then, leaving the military — slam on the brakes — we're only responsible for ourselves," Haft said. "There is something very nice about having a team again."

They handed over daily operations of the cafe to Tim Hayes, a former manager at Mockingbird Hill, a high-end coffee program down the street. They took on Brandon Warner, a trainee with little experience, to handle the roasting.

With Hayes, they interviewed baristas who didn't necessarily have coffee shop experience but displayed the correct attitude.

Hayes laid it out in one job interview, talking about the company's philosophy: "So, obviously, take care of customers. After that we're all about real good coffee, all the time," he said, repeating the company's motto. "The last thing, we just kind of sum it up as: Everybody cleans. No one's above a certain task."

'A new chapter of our lives'

On the night before opening, Haft

and Suarez swept the floors.

They were almost finished setting everything up, having just packaged a small run of espresso beans on their conveyor belt system and set up the cafe's sound system.

"We want everyone to come in tomorrow and for it to look like a real place," said Haft. They contemplated pulling down the brown paper that has covered the windows since February but decided against it: "I think we should pull it down tomorrow, as a team thing," said Haft.

By 2 a.m., they realized they had forgotten to bring the bottle of celebratory bourbon they planned to sip as they put the finishing touches on the place. Instead, Harrison pulled out a bottle of rosé. They had to borrow a corkscrew from Ivy and Coney, a bar next door. They served it in espresso cups.

For Haft and Suarez, finishing construction and opening their doors is an ending and a beginning.

After returning from Afghanistan, "you're in such a different world," said Haft. "It takes a long time to get normal again."

"I think tomorrow is going to be a really concrete transition into a new chapter of our lives," said Suarez.

At 3:15 a.m., they dimmed the lights and locked the doors.

'Isn't this fun?'

The next morning, Compass already smelled sweet. Laura Saltzman of 7th Street Baking had arrived at 7 a.m. and was cooling trays of biscuits and biscot-

ti on the bar. As the baristas and managers trickled in and helped themselves to a French press of Compass's signature Cardinal blend ("Balanced, milk chocolate, toasted nuts," described the packaging), everyone busied themselves quietly. Assistant Manager Nicolette Grams selected the music. Baristas brewed tea and poured Saltzman's homemade caramel syrup into squeeze bottles. Suarez stacked stirrers and napkins and arranged a condiment bar.

No plan survives first contact. One of their grinders became jammed. The menu would not adhere to the wall, and attempts to get it to do so left six quarter-size holes. And one employee who had diligently reported for training all week was a no-show. The opening time was pushed back nearly two hours.

"Isn't this fun?" asked Suarez, sarcastically. "At least the coffee's good. . . . Everything's going wrong, and it doesn't matter. This brings people together."

Haft's father appeared in his running clothes and sat at a corner table, watching the preparations with a gleam in his eye. It took him back to his days opening Crown Books, he said.

"No matter what you think you've done, you don't know until the first customer comes in," he said.

The aprons went on. The temporary menu — with the word "cappuccino" spelled incorrectly, but no one had time to care — went up. And at 11:39 a.m., the doors opened and the paper came down. In no more than 15 minutes, the

cafe was full. (The fact that the coffee was free that day, of course, didn't hurt.)

There were moms with strollers and students with GRE textbooks. There were men in lederhosen from Dacha, the biergarten across the block. There were all of the people who have helped them along the way: their Advisory Neighborhood Commission chairperson, Alex Padro; one of their steel fabricators, Joe Margot; their project architect, George Wabuge. The baristas called out orders: "Macchiato for Eric!" "Caramel latte for Kristen!" "Ethiopian pour-over for Brie!" It already felt as though the space had been full for months.

"Well, congratulations," said Haft, shaking Suarez's hand. "It was a s--- show."

They surveyed the crowd. This is what it meant to chew slowly.

Compass Coffee maintained a steady stream of customers for five hours before Hayes gently ushered a few stragglers out. The next day, it would open at 7 a.m. There was still a lot of work to be done: first and foremost, washing the windows, which were dirty from having been covered up for so long. Haft and Suarez grabbed rags and Windex and went to work.

The two have decided not to take a salary until the business has reached certain goals. As Haft explained, "The saying in the Marines is, 'Officers eat last.'" And everybody cleans.

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Compass Coffee is at 1535 Seventh St. NW; compasscoffee.com.

"Everything's going wrong, and it doesn't matter. This brings people together."

Harrison Suarez co-founder, Compass Coffee

June 6

"The case of the missing orange zoning sign": Compass faces the Board of Zoning Adjustment.



June 18

"Cookies and the cost of doing business": Haft and Suarez test recipes with 7th Street Baking.



July 10

"Running on fumes": A custom-built glass cube is erected around the roaster; the co-founders are deprived of sleep.



August 13

"Not hipstery, not Starbucks": Compass's graphic designer discusses the company's branding.



August 29

"The health inspection": A "legendary" health inspector gives the cafe a once-over.



September 17

"Legacy and legwork": Mentors chime in about the entrepreneurs' progress.



September 21

"Everybody trains, and everybody cleans": Compass hires and trains its baristas.



PHOTO FROM JUNE 6, MAURA JUDKIS/THE WASHINGTON POST; JUNE 18, AUGUST 13 AND AUGUST 29, FROM COMPASS COFFEE; JULY 10 AND SEPTEMBER 17-21, MELINA MARA/THE WASHINGTON POST

COMPASS COFFEE, FROM THE GROUND UP

The Going Out Guide blog has been following the founders of Compass Coffee since March, with periodic posts about the cafe's progress. Michael Haft and Harrison Suarez granted staff writer Maura Judkis access to many of the meetings, processes and plans required to open a business in the District of Columbia, giving readers insight into the permitting process, architectural design, menu development and hiring of staff. Go to wapo.st/compasscoffee to read the full collection of Judkis's "From the Ground Up" stories, and see videos and photos of the cafe and roastery.

March 21

"Introducing Compass Coffee": Background on the founders and their time in Afghanistan.



March 31

"Compass's subterranean coffee lab": An in-depth look at how the shop roasts its beans.



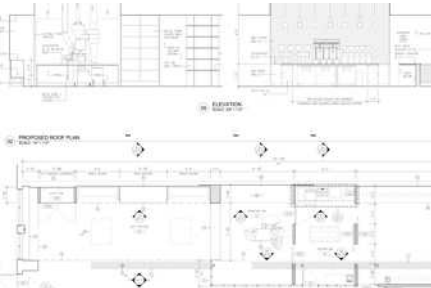
April 11

"The beauty of a laundromat": How Compass chose a former laundromat for its cafe.



April 24

"The 42-page blueprint": Compass's architects talk about the cafe's design.



May 2

"Sparks fly as Compass builds its furniture": A day in the welding shop with Haft and Suarez.



May 12

"Objects in cup may be hotter than they appear": Choosing coffee cups, and a visit to the can factory.



May 23

"How to install a 2,900-pound coffee roaster": The custom-built machinery arrives.



PHOTOS FROM MARCH 21-APRIL 11 AND MAY 12, FROM COMPASS COFFEE; APRIL 24 FROM BRIE HUSTED ARCHITECTURE; MAY 2 AND MAY 23, MELINA MARA/THE WASHINGTON POST



PHOTOS BY MELINA MARA/THE WASHINGTON POST

Above: Compass Coffee co-owners Michael Haft, left, and Harrison Suarez stand on their handmade iron furniture as the new shop takes shape around them. Below left: Assistant manager Alex Parker, from left, Pauline Lee, Nicolette Grams, Mike Stringer and Brittany Pugh practice pouring lattes during the week before opening day. Below right, trainees get the feel of the machines.



An ending turns into a beginning

COMPASS COFFEE FROM E1

'What am I capable of?'

They drank terrible coffee in the Marines, but it cost only a dollar, and it helped them through Officer Candidate School.

"Sleep deprivation is part of the training," Haft said. "So you buy a 20-ounce cup of coffee for a dollar, and it's disgusting, but it has the caffeine and it keeps you awake."

They needed the fuel for late nights studying for their courses — including one in land navigation, where the two helped each other learn the old-fashioned way, with a map and compass. "It's one of the most important skills for a Marine: to know where you are, and where you're going, and how to get there," said Haft.

Haft, especially, had hoped the military would be an equalizer: The youngest generation of Washington's prominent Haft family — his grandfather founded a series of pharmacies and other businesses, and his father, Robert S. Haft, founded Crown Books and Vitamins.com — he relished the opportunity to defy expectations.

"Basically, everything was — not given to me, but it's hard to tell the difference between what was merit and what was based on my parents," Haft said. "The Marines don't care at all about that. . . . Joining the Marines was a lot about proving to myself, what am I capable of?"

He and Suarez, who first met at Washington University in St. Louis, became fast friends. They were sta-

tioned together at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina and deployed to Afghanistan together as platoon commanders, only a few miles apart in the city of Nawa, in May 2011. Once they had fulfilled their obligations as infantry officers in Afghanistan, they emerged seeking a new challenge.

But first, they wanted to drink all of the best coffee they could get their hands on. It was through their experimentation in Haft's basement, which they outfitted with a roaster and every other type of coffee apparatus imaginable, that they wrote "Perfect Coffee at Home." A few months after it was published, they decided to open Compass, pouring their savings and very generous low-interest loans from both of their families into outfitting an old laundromat on Seventh Street NW with steel and oak fixtures and huge skylights.

A \$129,000 Loring roaster ("the Tesla of roasters," as Suarez often says) became the centerpiece of their shop and their lives. It has the capacity to roast up to 1 million pounds of coffee a year. They developed nine signature blends — three from each of the three major coffee-growing regions in the world — and sourced high-quality single-origin beans for their pour-overs.

Their roastery would be led by one defining principle: Coffee, said Suarez, should be "both really good and really simple. You don't have to choose between the two."

'No plan survives first contact'

Haft, 27, and Suarez, 26, set off on

their journey, learning to navigate the rocky path of entrepreneurship.

"We knew it would be hard, but we didn't know it would be *this* hard," said Haft.

Some parts of the process came naturally.

Detail-oriented, the duo poured hours of research and testing into the smallest decisions, from which mugs felt the best in both men's and women's hands to which shade of orange conveyed the right warmth in their logo.

They visited almost all of their suppliers, loading the car up with carafes of coffee and a playlist of Drake songs for the long drives to paper distributors, dairy farms and more. They made a special trip to the Independent Can Co. in Belcamp, Md., to stand next to a noisy conveyor belt of machinery that was rhythmically embossing the Compass logo into the lids of coffee tins. That was one of the first signs that their plans were becoming real.

Another was the furniture. Haft, who always had an eye for design growing up, decided to craft the cafe's tables as a way of saving money. The project quickly evolved to include welding shelves and benches, and pouring cement for the coffee bar. Day after day, they shuttled back and forth between the construction site and TechShop, a Crystal City workshop full of power tools. Suarez measured, Haft cut. Then, they'd lower their masks and fill their workspace with a spray of blue sparks.

Furniture-making was also a con-

stant for them throughout the unpredictable process of red tape and construction delays. After a while, it became clear that they weren't just building benches; they were building their new lives.

"We come here in the morning, we drink coffee, and we make something that somebody is going to use for years to come," Suarez said.

Sometimes, they lost their way. They were stymied by bureaucracy dozens of times, especially when they went up against the D.C. Board of Zoning Adjustment. Their business was categorized as a prepared-foods shop, limiting it to 18 seats, but the space could hold much more. They applied for an exemption but failed to follow proper procedure in hanging an orange zoning sign in their window, delaying their request.

"If----d up," a crestfallen Suarez said, standing in the hallway outside the hearing on May 13. "I'm new to this."

It was only a temporary setback: Compass was granted the zoning relief on June 3. Still, the midsummer opening date they had hoped for came and went, and their windows remained papered over.

In the Marines, "the saying is, no plan survives first contact," Haft said. "You come up with an idea of what you're going to do for your patrol, but really, as soon as you see the enemy or something goes wrong, your entire plan changes."

They might have been complete novices to the food and beverage industry. **COMPASS COFFEE CONTINUED ON E5**

"We knew it would be hard, but we didn't know it would be this hard."

Michael Haft co-founder, Compass Coffee