

LOCAL FLAVOR

Alabama Breaks New Ground

The state has a buzzworthy crop of passionate roasters. Here, we filter out our favorites



HIGHER GROUND ROASTERS

Leeds



Glenn Smith, Alex Varner, and Josh Kelly opened the first coffee roaster in the Birmingham area when they founded Higher Ground 10 years

ago. From the start, the partners decided all of their coffee would be made from beans that were certified organic, fair trade, and shade-grown. Now they encourage visitors to come by to learn the fine art of bean-to-bag coffeemaking.

TRY A CUP: Higher Ground's Magic City Blend is a medium-roasted, slightly sweet coffee made from a combination of several Central American beans (\$10.99/12-ounce bag). 8110 Parkway Drive; highergroundroasters.com

SEEDS COFFEE COMPANY

Birmingham



Seeds' head roaster Jeff Huey roasted his first batch of beans in a stove-top popcorn popper about

a year ago. Then, joined by four friends, Jeff bought a small-batch roaster, moved it to the back room of a real estate office, and opened Seeds, Birmingham's only

nonprofit coffee roaster, in March. This month, in addition to making organic coffees using only fair-trade beans, Jeff and his crew will also start offering house-made scones for breakfast (\$5) as well as a rotating lunch menu.

TRY A CUP: The organic blueberry-jammed Ethiopia Harrar is a smooth way to start the morning (\$12/pound). 174 Oxmoor Road; seedscoffee.com or 205/240-8030

OCTANE COFFEE

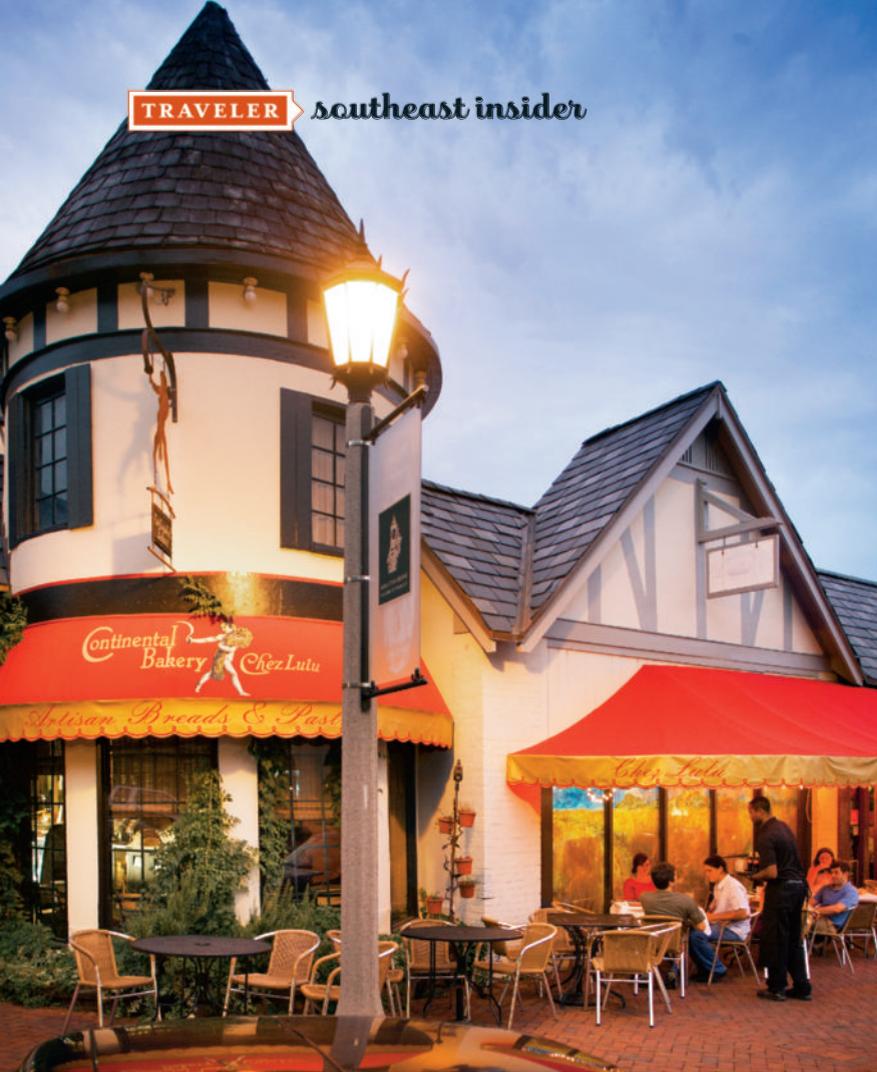
Homewood



The state's newest roaster will open later this year on Homewood's Central Avenue

as Brett Burton and Brian Wilson (manager and head roaster of the town's popular Primavera Coffee Roasters) merge their business with the Atlanta-based Octane Coffee houses. In addition to freshly roasted javas, Alabama's Octane will also feature a cafe offering draft beers, classic cocktails, and small plates featuring appetizers such as bacon fat caramel corn (\$3).

TRY A CUP: The floral Guatemalan comes from the country where Brett learned his craft working on a coffee farm (\$12.99/12-ounce bag). 2821 Central Avenue; octanecoffee.com or 205/969-1177



The Continental Bakery (left) in the Birmingham suburb of Mountain Brook serves Octane's coffees, including an artful Cafe Mocha (below).



TOOMER'S COFFEE ROASTERS

Auburn



Sandy and Trish Toomer learned to love freshly roasted coffee while living in Costa Rica. "We were working as missionaries and lived in Costa Rica for a year

taking language training," Trish says. "There, we discovered great coffees, and when we moved back to the U.S. we couldn't find any as good." So the Toomers (no relation to the family that owns the famous drugstore) settled in Auburn and started roasting and selling their own. "We buy as many beans as we can from small family, tribal, and community co-op farms in Central America and

Asia," Trish says. "We like knowing the people who supply our beans. We call it 'friendship coffee.' "

TRY A CUP: Made from a blend of three kinds of Arabica beans, the dark Auburn City Blend gives the day an orange-and-blue glow (\$13.99/pound). 1100 South College Avenue, Suite 102; toomerscoffee.com or 334/329-9852

SPRINGHILL COFFEE ROASTERS

Mobile



As soon as Van and Tomi Sue Rusling saw the 100-year-old Victorian house in Mobile's Springhill neighborhood, they knew they'd found the perfect place for their coffee business.

(Sadly, Van passed away in 2005.) Now working with local roast master Alan Tolson, Tomi Sue roasts hundreds of pounds of beans a week in one room of the restored home and offers coffees, espresso-based drinks, and teas, as well as homemade muffins, scones, salads, and sandwiches in the Carpe Diem Coffee & Tea Co. Cafe, which occupies the rest of building. "We also sell our roasted beans to fine restaurants around the South," Tomi Sue says.

TRY A CUP: Grown at the foot of Mount Kilimanjaro, the peaberry coffee bean gives Springhill's Tanzanian Peaberry blend a sweet, soft flavor (\$15/pound). 4072 Old Shell Road; springhillcoffee.roasters.com or 251/304-0448

THE KAFFEEKLATSCH

Huntsville



When Grant and Kathy Heath moved to Huntsville in 1976, the Rocket City was mainly fueled by bad coffee. So they rented an empty building,

installed a classic 1929 Jabez Burns roaster, and opened the city's first coffeehouse. These days, Kaffeeklatsch ("in German it means a social gathering around coffee, or literally 'coffee gossip,' " Grant explains) offers coffees from around the world as well as 50 varieties of loose teas.

TRY A CUP: Kathy loves the medium-bodied Costa Rican (\$17.25/pound). 103 Jefferson Street; kaffeeklatsch.com or 256/539-1636 ☪