ILLUSTRATION BY PHIL MARKEL

HELLO AGAIN, FRIENDS, and welcome to the late summer season. It seems like just last week when we were posted at *Barista Magazine*'s booth at the Global Specialty Coffee Expo in Seattle. We want to say thank you to everyone who stopped by to say hello and chat about equipment with us. We were super surprised by the turnout, and stoked to meet everyone and chat about everything from some impressively well-thought-out technical questions, to pondering the meaning of life. We definitely solved that mystery, but we told our editor, Sarah Allen, that she has to wait to get that scoop until some later issue. We figured this round of "High Maintenance" would be better spent answering more important questions like the ones that follow. Here we go!

You know that rattling sound on the [Mahlkönig] EK43 grinder? What is that sound and what does it mean? Does it affect the grind size and/or extraction?

There are many things that could cause a rattling sound in a grinder. Have your trusty coffee technician check for bad bearings, loose motor mounts, and any screws that are not tightened down all the way. These are all things that will potentially make rattling sounds on any grinder (or really anything with a motor), not only an EK. Bad bearings or motor mounts could possibly affect the grind quality and/or consistency, but general loose screws and such are likely just being loud. Good luck!

—Alex

What kind of maintenance or service issues should I be aware of for my draft-cold-brew setup?

Finally, a draft (draught) question! As always, cleanliness is king. It is super important to keep your product lines, couplers (taps), and faucets sparkling. We all know how quickly coffee oils can build up on various surfaces, and those draft lines are no exception.

In most areas, it's easy to find a cleaning service willing to come in once a week and take care of it for you. However, if you feel like it's something you want to take on yourself, it's pretty simple to do but a little time-consuming.

If you're using Corny or Soda kegs, all you need is an empty keg, some coffee cleaner, and a couple of small brushes. If you are using standard Sanke kegs, you'll need to track down a pressure bottle from Keg Outlet or your local homebrew supply store. The process is the same no matter which type of keg you're using. Hook-up the keg with the cleaning solution to the product line and gas supply, then simply let it flow through the system. Think of it like backflushing: Open and close the faucet a few times and let the solution sit in the line for a bit. Once the line looks nice and clean, be sure

“Is it OK to dump milk out through your drip tray? I’ve heard it’s OK but some people are super against it.”

to repeat the process with plenty of clean water before putting it back in service.

It is also important to make sure those product lines are kept cold the whole way through the system, and be sure that they don’t get exposed to light. Other than cleaning, it’s probably not a bad idea to have a handful of the different seals and washers for the couplers and regulator around. Change them out if you see any bubbling, foaming, or hissing.

—Double J

We have noticed that across all our stores on the same recipe and coffee, the coffee seems to not taste as good in the afternoon than in the morning. What could be the possible reasons?

This is our body’s way of telling us it’s time to switch to beer. I kid, I kid.

Seriously though, the first question I have is, do you do a midday cleaning of the groups? Backflushing throughout the day and cleaning the portafilters really helps to keep your flavor profiles consistent through a long day. A few hours of rush time can leave a lot of residue on screens, baskets, and portafilters. One shop I worked at as a barista way back in the day would do a backflush with water every hour! We also had an extra set of portafilters that we swapped in at some point in the middle of the day so we could soak and clean the morning set.

If your shop is slower in the afternoons, and depending on the type of machine you use, the reason could be that the whole group assemblies have had more time to cool down. Dual-boiler or individual-brew-boiler machines are great for maintaining a stable temperature, but they can lose some heat while the water travels out of the group and through a cooler brew valve, basket/portafilter etc. Conversely, they can heat up too much.

Traditional heat-exchanger machines heat their brew water with contact from the steam boiler, which is well above boiling, between uses, resulting in less consistency in extractions due to some temperature loss (or boiling brew water) at the groups. You might need to train the staff to do a little temperature surfing if the machine has been idle for more than a few minutes to get everything back in line.

—Alex

My grinder is on its finest setting and I can't move it any farther, but I need my coffee finer. What do I do?

It sounds like you are either in need of new burrs or a range adjustment. When the burrs get dull, they can't properly grind the coffee, and instead pulverize it, which results in a very uneven particle distribution. Plus, if you go so fine that the shots run in the right time frame, your grinder may jam. When they get really dull, you can even feel the coffee coming out a bit warm or hot due to the extra friction happening in there.

For portion-control-type grinders (Mazzer E series, Mythos, K30, etc.), you may also notice your dose being erratic, or you may be constantly needing to set the grind time longer and longer.

If it's neither of these things, though, you may have a grinder that needs to be calibrated. All of these possible causes can be tricky to fix and do properly on your own, so we would recommend you give your local tech a call (or at the very least see if you can track down the manual for your grinder before attempting anything yourself). If you do work on your own grinders, be sure to unplug them while you do so. That way you keep all of your fingers!

—Alex

Is it ok to dump milk out through your drip tray? I've heard it's OK, but some people are super against it.

This is an age-old question that's been circling the cosmos for centuries. Coming from someone who has been on countless service calls to blow through that dark and smelly spiral tubing, however, I must say: For the love of all that is good, do not pour milk of any kind down your drip tray! The drain box and tubing below already gunk up quick with coffee grounds and oils, so the milk just gets caught up in there and turns into stinky little slugs. You and your tech will be much happier if you get yourself a pitcher rinser dedicated to the cause. In closing I would simply like to say, in the immortal words of Ron Burgundy, "Milk was a bad choice."

—Double J