



Mona Latte

Barista serves up city's most artistic cappuccinos

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WHEN one of Manhattan's most reputable Italian eateries installed a Chinese barista, heads turned. Gone was Lorenzo, the restaurant's traditionally Italian barista, replaced by a young man who had been raised drinking jasmine tea. Yet six years later, Bottega Del Vino's Sammy Lin is gaining notoriety as the city's finest cappuccino artist.

Sammy Lin knocks out over 700 lattes, espressos and caps a day at the East 59th Street restaurant. But this is no ordinary coffee. Having created the "perfect creamy foam" as his canvas, he sets about designing intricate artworks atop his offerings, tailored to his customers' quirks. Be it a monkey, a Chinese symbol, an umbrella or some detailed flora and fauna, Sammy brings a little extra to your daily fix.

Formerly a music teacher raised in Fuzhou, South China, Sammy was working the coffee machine within days of

arriving in Manhattan. "I got a lot of complaints at first," he laughs. "I learned from Lorenzo. He taught me everything about the steam, the grain, and the foam. The customers taught me the rest."

Just how does Sammy decide who gets what? "It depends on how much time I have, and on the customer. My favorites are the flower and the leaf — I can make them in five seconds, whereas a monkey face takes 20 seconds. It also depends on the type of coffee they want. A latte has a brown foam in which I carve a white design, a cappuccino is the other way around."

And we had to ask — what's his most memorable design request? "To make the Mona Lisa smile! Leonardo couldn't do it, but I can!"

THIS CAP'S FOR YOU: Sammy Lin toasts his customers with one of his special (heavily caffeinated) designs.

