



[Home](#) > [Business Today](#) > [Business News](#) > [XML RSS Feed](#)

## New cafe society: Java havens buck chain stars

By **Paul Restuccia**

Sunday, October 23, 2005 - Updated: **09:19 AM EST**

**C**all it a jolt of good old-fashioned entrepreneurship.

Despite the ubiquitous presence of national coffee chains, local-area neighborhoods are brimming with independently owned cafes where residents are getting not just high-quality coffee but an injection of community spirit.

Cafes are springing up in older urban squares in places like Somerville, Cambridge, Medford, Lynn and Waltham - neighborhoods that are also emerging as destinations for young homebuyers priced out of the expensive Boston market as well as artists looking for cheaper studio space.

The cafes, many opened by neighborhood residents, have become welcoming places for new, often more educated professionals, artists and students who have relocated to working-class enclaves.

Sometimes called hipster cafes, these places brew more than just java. The owners often hire architects to create distinctive interiors.

The cafes hang the work of local artists on their walls and feature large community bulletin boards. Some are also venues for local performers and places where community groups and even public officials hold meetings.

And of course, all offer WiFi Web connections - for no charge or for a small fee - so customers with laptops can work or study while they sip.

Steve Feldmann says he felt out of place in downtown Lynn when he and his wife moved a year and a half ago into a loft in an old factory building.

"There were a lot of new residents here like us who didn't feel we had a place to call our own," says Feldmann, a 33-year-old MBA who had been living in Jamaica Plain.

Feldmann opened the Gulu Gulu Cafe in downtown Lynn in May and it has quickly become the focal point for new residents. His idea: create a local meeting place that serves coffee, pastries, soup and sandwiches during the day, and at night becomes a European-style wine and specialty beer bar with music, spoken-word performances and even movies.

He also wanted his cafe - named after a place in Prague where he met his Czech wife - to bridge the cultural divide between old-timers and newcomers that often exists in older urban neighborhoods.

"I find myself introducing people to one another," says Feldmann, who adds that his customers include everyone from artists and elderly residents to Lynn public officials. "I'm drawing a wide mix of customers, including people from the Russian community in the area."

The Danish Pastry House in Medford's Hillside neighborhood, adjacent to Tufts, offers high-quality coffees paired with authentic Danish pastry and gourmet items, soups and sandwiches.

Co-founder Ulla Winkler is a native of Denmark.

"We put a lot into creating the look - something well-designed but also warm and welcoming," says Winkler, 40, who operated a flower shop next door to the cafe for 12 years before taking the plunge in May. "The most important thing to running a successful cafe is to do everything from the heart. What I like about our(s) is that it has cross-generational appeal. It draws students, professors, elders and families with young children."

The Soleil Cafe in Teele Square specializes in Mediterranean-style sandwiches. La Piazza in downtown Waltham is the kind of cafe you might find in the North End. Simon's Coffee Shop in Porter Square focuses on coffee connoisseurs.

"I can't compete head-to-head with the chains so I focus on better service and the highest quality beans," says Simon Yu, 34, who is doing well despite three Starbucks within a half-mile radius.

The Sherman Cafe in Somerville's Union Square, founded by Toscanini's ice cream shop veteran Karyn Coughlin and her architect husband Ben Dryer, also uses high-quality beans.

But its special twist is to offer pastries made on the premises and gourmet sandwiches and salads with organically grown ingredients.

"There's something really romantic about the idea of opening a cafe, but in reality it's hard work and long hours," said Coughlin, 32, whose husband designed and built their 19-seat shop that opened two years ago.

"You shouldn't open a cafe without knowing what to expect. It becomes your whole life."

Most independent cafe owners say they are profitable although their presence sometimes sparks



The husband-and-wife team of Ben Dryer and Karen Coughlin own the Sherman Cafe in Union Square, Somerville. (Staff photo by Patrick Whittemore)

### Herald Interactive Tools



[Related articles](#)



[E-mail article to a friend](#)



[View graphic version](#)



[Post comments in the forums](#)



[Get RSS feed](#)



[Search site](#)



[Subscribe to the Boston Herald](#)

### Herald Columnists

#### [Travelin' pols' disguise: Be sober](#)

By **Howie Carr**

The probate reps on the lam in Europe are reportedly trying to juggle their return airline reserva... [\[more\]](#)



retail rent increases. Some cafes, like the Diesel in Somerville, are huge successes. The 6-year-old cafe is about to expand, from 65 to 110 seats, and has over 30 employees.

The Diesel has benefited from the popularity of Davis Square shops and theaters and attracts scores of nearby students as well as artists and young professionals. It serves high-quality organic coffee drinks, ice cream drinks and sandwiches. It has regular art exhibits and is a meeting place for many local arts and political groups. It even sports two pool tables.

The Diesel's twist is that it's as much an artist community as a cafe. Employees are required to write essays, make short films and do art projects. The cafe's owners hold a prom for their workers every year.

"Our idea was to create a community, a place where people could hang out that's an alternative to the bar scene," says Jen Park, 28, one of the founders of the cafe, which doesn't serve alcohol.

The Diesel is open until midnight on weekdays and 1 a.m. on weekend nights. "The Diesel's not just a place to get coffee but to meet people," Park says. "We have customers who have met here and gotten married."

**Ads by Google**

**Coffee Franchises**

Coffee House Franchises For Sale Find Details and Requirements  
[www.franchisegator.com](http://www.franchisegator.com)





**Free Starbucks Gift Card**

Get a Free \$300 Starbucks Gift Card Simply Complete Our Online Offers!  
[FreeCoffee.YourSmartRewards.com](http://FreeCoffee.YourSmartRewards.com)

**Gourmet Coffee Beans**

Buy Gourmet, Freshly Roasted Coffee Beans Online. From \$3.00 A Pound!  
[www.CoffeeBeanDirect.com](http://www.CoffeeBeanDirect.com)

**Related articles**

-  [Somerville cops rip staffing](#)
-  [TONIGHT: Frames of reference](#)
-  [Somerville sanctuary: Builder carves loft out of former church](#)
-  [Somerville, builder take on rodents](#)

**Today's most read articles Updated 1:45 PM ET**

1. [Hale back with club as third base coach](#)
2. [Scaling new heights](#)
3. [Net result is Celts blowout](#)
4. [He calls a good game \(sort of\)](#)
5. [Born to run ... an offense: Patriots assistant Josh McDaniels heard his calling at a very young age](#)

**Search the site**

all
  relevance
 
  
 Past 7 days
  Archives
  Google

**Order home delivery**

Save up to 60% ordering Boston Herald home delivery online. » [click here](#)



[ [contact us](#) ] :: [ [print advertising](#) ] :: [ [online advertising](#) ] :: [ [Herald History](#) ] :: [ [News Tips](#) ] :: [ [Electronic Edition](#) ] :: [ [Browser Upgrade](#) ]

[Click here for home delivery](#) or call 1.800.882.1211 for **Back Issues** call 617.619.6523

© Copyright by the Boston Herald and Herald Media.  
No portion of BostonHerald.com or its content may be reproduced without the owner's written permission. [Privacy Commitment](#)

Enterprise-level broadband service provided by  
**Intellispace: Delivering Fast & Dependable**



Wireless broadband service provided by **Towerstream**



[Communication Solutions](#)



bh.heraldinteractive.com 0.402359