

## MAKERS & FINDERS COFFEE

BY ELISABETH DANIELS

Valeria Varela sits at a long wooden bar, which is embellished with a Greek key pattern she painted herself. An espresso machine whirs in the background, and the earthy fragrance of coffee beans wafts through the air. Varela tucks her long brown hair behind her ear and smiles. "There's so much that goes into producing coffee," she says. "So much inspiration. We went all in with this idea of merging both concepts: coffee and arepas."

Seated next to Varela, Josh Molina sips rich black coffee from a square glass mug. "What's tricky is we're not a coffee shop," he says, setting the cup down on the bar he and his cousin built. "We're really a restaurant coffee bar. That's been a challenge: identifying ourselves for us — and for our customers. We offer full table service, but we also have a coffee bar and a lounge area."

This unusual combination is a big part of why Makers & Finders Urban Coffee Bar is such a special addition to downtown Vegas. It took a while for Varela and Molina to figure out that winning formula. Back in 2011, they tossed around a variety of ideas for selling empanadas and arepas, visiting shops in New York City and even considering a food truck at one point. Sojourns to coffee farms in Colombia and Peru in 2015 taught them to appreciate the art of drying and grinding beans. The path became clear: a café focused on handcrafted coffee and authentic Latin comfort food made from Molina's family recipes.

Quality java takes time, which is why there's a disclaimer at the top of the coffee menu: "All coffee and espresso is ground, brewed and made to order. Please allow 5-5 minutes for order, depending on method." Molina, 26, learned that people would wait, patiently and happily, for a handcrafted drink during a stint at Herbs & Rye. He and Varela, 25, decided to apply the craft cocktail culture to coffee and figured downtown Vegas was the perfect place to do it.

"We were able to step into this early on," says Molina. "Part of us coming here and investing so much time and money is that we're excited about what lies ahead for downtown Vegas."



Varela agrees. "It's so fantastic that we're building up a more local community. We get a great mix of people that come in. The people here in the Arts District have been so welcoming and supportive."

And the clientele is expanding. Varela notes, "The outskirts of Vegas are coming in to see what's going on. We've had a lot of customers from Henderson, Summerlin and Mountain's Edge. It's not that far, actually. It's only about 15 minutes."

Along with fair-trade, organic beans and a small but innovative menu, the ambiance has helped Makers & Finders become a hotspot in the few months it's been open. The space is comfortable yet chic — and a bit irreverent. There's a shaded patio for cappuccino and conversation alfresco. Inside, a cushy

black couch rests against a lemon yellow wall adorned with a goat's head eating berries. The words, "It's good to be here," are stenciled on a ceiling duct, and miniature succulents in mason jars give each tabletop a pop of green. With free Wi-Fi, outlets under the bar and a social table for groups, it's a suitable hangout for freelancers and students. Full-service dining makes it a great place for brunch or an extended lunch meeting.

Makers & Finders is known for its chorizo Brussels sprouts, a modern twist on old-school veggies — with crispy onions, sautéed mushrooms and grilled shrimp. For an Old Vegas experience, there's the Elvis Press: a grilled peanut butter and banana sandwich with bacon and Nutella, sprinkled with powdered sugar. It comes with a side of sliced fresh fruit to make you feel more virtuous. The omelets are generous and served with crispy

plantains instead of hash browns.

All the coffee is brewed to order using a V60 pour-over station and a La Nuova Era espresso machine. Taking another cue from cocktail culture, Varela has developed specialty lattes with unexpected ingredients like sea salt, clove and other herbs. "We started off with the lavender; I love lavender; I love the scent. No one ever expects it with coffee. It's the best seller. The sage has also sold really well."

It all starts with the beans, though, as Varela and Molina learned in South America. They know they've gotten it right when a customer ditches the milk and sugar after trying their coffee black. "We all get a sense of accomplishment when someone says 'I don't want cream anymore,'" notes Varela.

"We had an older couple come in from New York City, and the gentleman told us it was one of the best cups of coffee he's ever had," Molina reports, grinning. "It says a lot about taking a little interest and time in how you handle your beans."

Molina sums it up this way: "We do it with intent and a true care for detail. That's where we've been able to flourish. We have a true passion, and we're more than happy to help everyone discover what a terrific place downtown is."



Makers & Finders  
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For more information  
 702.586.8255 | makersandfinderslv.com

They are open  
 Monday – Saturday from 7 a.m. – 4 p.m.