

**Zabar's Podcast**  
**Season 1 Episode 2: The Coffee**

**Willie Zabar:** Do you ever drink the coffee?

**Customer 1:** Everyday.

**Willie:** Yes.

**Customer 1:** Every morning.

**Customer 2:** I think the coffee's a great deal, It's still one of the best deals in the city. That's what I come to get often.

**Customer 3:** But I actually travel with Zabar's coffee. I actually take a french press, a travel french press, and my friends all know this. We were in the Himalayas and the sherpas had never tried coffee. It's a tea country. And so we had coffee after dinner, and they really enjoyed it. They enjoyed it so much we finished it. We went down to do some other things in the country and came back up about a week later. I just bought coffee that was local from a sort of specialty store in Delhi- I served it to the sherpas and they said, "no, we like the other one much better" and that was the Zabar's coffee.

**Willie Zabar:** Hi. Welcome to Zabar's podcast! I'm your host Willie Zabar. On this episode, we're talkin' coffee. Also known by the street names Java, Joe, and Bean Juice, coffee is one of the most popular drinks in the world. It's a big part of our business and for many of us, an essential part of our daily routine. I love coffee, but before we started making this episode, I didn't know that much about it. I knew that it's often brown, it's often hot, and it's often wet. But that was the extent of my knowledge. To fix this, I sat down with some people who know their way around a cup of coffee. You'll hear from co-owner and long-time coffee taster Saul Zabar, executive director David Zabar, and special guest Erika Vonie, who is a professional coffee expert. Additionally, you'll hear me get trained on the proper way to scoop and grind coffee beans from Eric in our coffee department. So let's dive head-first into a hot cup of coffee. First up, I wanted to get an overview of the different types of coffee we sell, because we have a lot. You can't really walk into the coffee department at Zabar's and say "give me a pound of coffee" any more than you can walk up to the appetizing counter and say "slice me a pound of fish." To be clear, you absolutely can do this, and the employee at the

counter will help you figure out what to get. I just can't guarantee the people behind you in line will be as understanding. So to get me situated, is the person who taught me how to brew my first cup of coffee.

**Willie:** Alright, I'm here with David Zabar. Why don't you introduce yourself and say a little bit about what you do at the store and how you're related to me.

**David Zabar:** Okay, well, Willie is my son. My grandfather started the business- my father, Stanley and Uncle Saul are there almost everyday. I'm there almost every day and, uh you know, my job is to see that everything keeps going. We do a lot of sampling. We sell a half pound so you can experiment with different coffees. We recommend getting two or three different half pounds of coffee and blending yourself to see how strong, if you like to mix, say an espresso into more of a Columbian and you find what level of strength you like. More people identify what they liked and what they wanted at home so i think the big revolution is making at home what you used to get at a restaurant, so the home espresso machines plus the simplicity of having different types of pods. You're able to make a much higher quality coffee at home and much more easily.

**Willie:** How many types of Zabar's coffee can you name right now?

**David:** We have Zabar's Blend and Columbian and Mocha style, Blue Mountain style. The espressos are Vienna, French Italian. Uh

**Willie:** That's good- that's a start. And Tuesdays coffee is loaded in right? Wanna describe what the spectacle is when they deliver it?

**David:** These multi-wheeled carts are used to move product boxes, whatever- So, these are loaded up with 60-pound bags of coffee from the truck and they're wheeled over to our basement hatch and then by conveyor belt, go into the basement of the store. It takes 3 or 4 guys to do this every Tuesday morning and maybe it's 100 bags of coffee then during the course of the week- bag by bag, it comes up a conveyor inside the store to our coffee department where we fill orders for shipping and for customers on premises. So this is a weekly spectacle.

**Willie:** Hm and they're big burlap sacks?

**David:** There are still plastic wine burlap sacks. I believe the green coffee beans come off the ship at 160 pound sacks and then we handle them in smaller sacks in the store.

**David:** We've been roasting our own coffee for more than 50 years. Saul feels it's different. It's a different taste. I drink it every day.

**Willie:** Now, my dad mentioned the difference between a light roast and a dark roast.

How the beans were roasted has a huge impact on the flavor of your morning coffee. This is precisely why Zabar's coffee is custom-roasted. Every week we taste samples of coffee roasted to different temperatures using a process called cupping. Saul Zabar has been personally involved in this process for more than 50 years. Here's a clip of Uncle Saul from a 2008 mini-documentary called "Spilling the Beans."

Link : <https://youtu.be/NLv7JXIAK3A>

**Saul Zabar:** "When I first got married, I got interested in coffee and coffee roasting, and coffee buying. Every afternoon around 4 oclock when I'm beginning to wain I go downstairs to our cafe and I pour myself a coffee. A cup of coffee is the perfect pickup. Traditionally we roast our coffees on Monday and then they're brought to us on Tuesday Morning. So if you want to get coffee that's almost out of the roaster, visit us on Tuesday morning and ask for the previous day's roast."

**Willie:** The full video is on Zabar's YouTube channel, we'll put a link to it in our show notes.

I wanted to do something different for this next part of the episode. I figured the best way to learn about our coffee department would be to spend some time working there. So join me in a new segment I like to call, "learning the ropes."

**Eric:** I'm Eric from the coffee department--

**Willie:** How long you've been working here?

**Eric:** Going on my third year--

**Willie:** Nice

Alright I'm here in the coffee department. I know I need gloves and I need an apron. Where could I find-?

**Eric:** You can find the gloves over here XL

**Willie:** Okay Awesome- that's me

**Eric:** and here goes an apron.

**Willie:** So, pretend it's my first day. I'm a new coffee employee- what do you show me first?

**Eric:** Well I would show you how to make a pound of coffee for a customer. One whole scoop and then a little bit more. When it's

a pound put it on the scale- its .88- you go until it's a pound. When it's a pound you hit Zabar's and print. If they want beans you just fold it up but if they want it ground you throw it in the grinder.

\*Grinds\* We can always use #5 coffee, we're gonna use it today.

**WILLIE:** So in 2011, I think it was hurricane Irene. It was the only time in history all three of my brothers and I here at the same time. I was in deli, Danny was kinda working on the floor in general, I believe Michael was at the register and Ben was at coffee.

**WILLIE:** Hey can I help you with anything

**CUSTOMER:** 3 pounds of Zabar's blend, ground number 4

**WILLIE:** So this is the Zabar's blend? This one?

**ERIC:** No no no that one.

**WILLIE:** This one right. Okay thanks

Its my first day. First day in this department, at least.

**CUSTOMER:** Smells nice

**WILLIE:** It does, right?

\*Grinding\*

**WILLIE:** This time I'm gonna put the bag underneath before I start grinding. I learned that the hard way

**ERIC:** You did a lot better than me- i had beans all over the place

**Willie:** How long have you been shopping at Zabar's?

**Customer:** Since 1984? A while.

**Willie:** For our last segment, I'd like to welcome coffee expert Erika Vonie. I first heard of Erika when she appeared on the coffee episode of "Basics with Babish," a spinoff of the popular YouTube cooking show "Binging with Babish." We invited her to the store to see the Coffee department, then followed up remotely so she could walk us through how she brews coffee at home.

**Erikia Vonie:** My name is Erika Vonie. I've been working in coffee for over 15 years and I am currently an independent consultant, but I've been a barista, a manager, bought and sold green coffee, I won an international coffee competition and I have the coffee equivalent of a wine somalia certificate so coffee's kinda my life.

**Willie:** Are you familiar with Zabar's?

**Erika:** I am familiar with Zabars.

**Willie:** Well, I'm glad you're here.

**Erika:** Yeah I am too.

**Willie:** Shall we go inside?

**Erika:** Yeah, let's check it out!

**Willie:** So, we are gonna send you home with some coffee.

**Erika:** I'm so excited.

**Willie:** Pick whatever three you want.

**Willie:** Cool, let's get in line!

**Erika:** I'm gonna ask you for your favorite or recommendation.

**Willie:** Sure, I'm a big fan of the royal blend, the Zabar's blend is a classic. Let's ask them, see what's popular

**Erika:** Hi, how's it going? I'm gonna get three bags of coffee- could I get the royal blend, the Zabar's blend and do you drink coffee?

**Employee:** I like the French-Italian

**Erika:** Let's do that too- Easy.

**Employee:** How do you want it ground?

**Erika:** I'll keep it whole bean actually, thank you

**Erika :** Yes that's perfect thank you so much!

**Willie:** Thanks alot

Here's the second part of our conversation.

Alright so first of all hi Erika

**Erika:** Hi Willie

**Willie:** Good to see you at the store, good to see you now.

Imagine I'm an anthropologist who comes from a culture where we don't drink coffee. How do you explain the role of coffee in our society?

**Erika:** Ooh, what a good question! Well my gut instinct, right off the bat, I would say that coffee is a conduit for community. The coffee house itself, the café, has historically been a place where meetings of the minds can come together. You can meet your friends, you can meet coworkers, you just sit and enjoy this warm and energizing drink while discussing really cool ideas.

**Willie:** So, I know coffee is highly technical. Tell me some of the factors that impact how coffee tastes.

**Erika:** So, coffee's variabilities begin at origin so depending on what country the coffee comes from, what type of coffee the tree is, like if you think of apples- you've got granny smith and red delicious and fuji and all these different types of apples. You also have that variety in coffee as well. The way that it's processed. All coffee is a fermented process just like all of our favorite things- just like beer and wine and bread and

chocolate. How it's fermented, how long it's fermented, how long it's dried for, how long it stays in storage- all of those things affect the coffee flavor even before it gets to the roaster. I like to make the analogy of a mixing board in like audio engineering so instead of just venn diagrams where you try to Goldielocks it with one or two variables, there's just a ton of different variables. You can have the same coffee and have it taste wildly different based off of the way it's roasted and who's preparing it alone.

**Willie:** It reminds me- because my dad is very into photography, and he was talking about how the gelatin that goes into in the film stock- it comes from cows- and how depending on what the cows ate it its takes a different amount of time to develop the film

**Erika:** OH!

**Willie:** So, it sounds like a similar thing so you're adjusting in real time based on these weird factors that are outside your control and you're like how do I compensate for this.

**Erika:** Oh, wow. Thank you for sharing that tidbit- I had no idea.

**Willie:** So yeah, when you visited us at the store we sent you home with three different kinds of coffee, do you wanna walk us through the three different kinds that we gave you?

**Erika:** I'll start with what ended up being my favorite which was the royal blend. Yeah I think that you said that was yours as well?

**Willie:** Yeah that's usually what I go for

**Erika:** So, the royal blend I really loved. I was playing around with it a lot as espresso. One of the things that I noticed that I really liked was that it tasted great as a shot but it just rocked as a cappuccino. It had this caramelly, chocolate thing- It almost tasted like a mocha even without adding any chocolate to it. As you can see, you sent me home with a full bag and I maybe have a couple shots left of it. You also sent me home with the Zabar's blend, which was great. I made that as a classic drip coffee and I was like this is New York's coffee. It's so easy to make a light and sweet out of it and it's that dark roast that kinda hits you in the face. I sipped it and I was back on the subway commuting to work. I was like, oh this is what New York tastes like.

Then I got the French-Italian cuz that's what the coffee that guy that was working really liked. Honestly, personally, for my preference, it was a little dark. I like something that is bold, has a lot of flavor, but that one was like really dark. So, I made it for a friend of mine who likes really dark coffee and he was like, "oh yeah. This is the jam. This is the stuff that I want". You'd take a sip and you'd feel the hairs growing on your chest a little bit.

**Erika:** The Royal Blend that you guys have, really compliments milk really well. And vice versa. Like I said- milk and coffee are best friends. Milk just adds sugar, it adds fat, it adds texture, it adds flavor, and then when the coffee is already dope, and tastes really good, and tastes like caramel, and is nice and rounded, you put those two things together- i'd eat that ice cream flavor, i'd drink that drink- those are all things that sound really good together.

**Willie:** Let's make some coffee!

**Erika:** Yeah, I'll walk you through on how to make a cappuccino and part of that is making an espresso so, hold on one second I gotta get a rag. So, now we're gonna grind it.

**Willie:** And which blend are you grinding right now?

**Erika:** Royal.

**Willie:** Nice.

**Erika:** The fave. Alright, so we're steaming the milk now.

**Willie:** Cheers!

**Erika:** Cheers! Yeah I did a pretty good job on that one. I wish you guys could taste it!

**Willie:** Well Erika, thanks so much for doing this, and please tell everyone where they can find your stuff online.

**Erika:** I'm an independent consultant but you can go to my website [www.ErikaVonie.com](http://www.ErikaVonie.com) I also have a [YouTube](#), I haven't updated it in a while but there's a lot of really good home coffee tutorials like how to make a better cup of coffee on a Black & Decker machine. So that's me!

**Willie:** Alright great, thank you so much for doing this.

**Erika:** Cool, thanks Willie, thank you so much for having me!

**Willie:** Of course!

You've been listening to the Zabar's podcast! I'd like to thank Erika Vonie, Saul and David Zabar, Eric from the coffee

department, and all the customers who gave us those great testimonials.

Our next episode will focus on my great-grandparents Louis and Lilly Zabar who founded the store. It'll cover their childhoods in Ukraine, how they escaped the pogroms, and the early days of Zabar's. Until then, I'm Willie Zabar and I'll see you at the store.

The Zabar's Podcast is produced by Emily Charash with sound editing and mixing by Henry Butler. All funding made possible by Zabar's.