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Oxford Word of the Month – March: magic

noun: a double ristretto coffee with steamed milk.

THE STORY BEHIND THE WORD OF THE MONTH

Australian coffee drinkers, especially those in urban centres, are blessed with quality, choice, and good baristas when ordering their daily fix. Stories abound of Australian travellers complaining about the poor quality of coffee found in cafes in the UK, US, and Europe, and we are familiar with the ‘flat white revolution’ from down under that’s been exported to cities such as London and Paris.

The Australian love affair with various forms of espresso coffee really took off in the early 1980s. Before this, Italian and Greek cafes in Melbourne and Sydney had been serving espresso coffee for decades following post-war migration, but it took a while for the rest of the country to catch on.

Australian English is the beneficiary of our need for coffee. Amid the *cappuccinos* and *lattes*, *flat white*, *long black*, and *short black* are locally grown terms, all dating from the early stirrings of the espresso trend in the 1980s. The continuing popularity of the cappuccino also gave Australia the *babyccino* in the 1990s, and the *mugachino* in the 2000s.

The latest Australian coffee term to enter the lexicon is **magic**, first recorded in the current decade: ‘I’m loving the new style of coffee called a ‘**magic**’ ... double shot ristretto with a splash of milk.’ (*Geelong Advertiser*, 8 May 2014)

It has been described as a ‘three-quarter flat white’, a ‘three-quarter latte’, ‘more coffee-ish than a latte’, and as ‘Melbourne’s gift to the world’. The trend is strongly associated with Melbourne, where it’s said to have been invented: ‘The story goes that it was dubbed the **magic** at Ray in Brunswick some time back in the early 2000s.’ (*Sydney Morning Herald*, 21 January 2014) Naturally, the association with Melbourne has provoked the inevitable rivalry with Sydney. The same article asks: ‘Can Sydney make a **magic**?’

Perhaps the choice of **magic** as a name was influenced by its use in the name of two Melbourne institutions: an NBL team and, formerly, a radio station. But the appeal of the **magic** has now spread further afield. There is web evidence of it in cafes across the country from Perth to Brisbane. An Adelaide cafe acknowledges the origin, offering ‘a Melbourne **magic**’ on the menu. Tasmanians too know about it: ‘Make mine a ‘**magic**’. So hot right now... Order one now before it’s so

cool it becomes uncool.’ (Hobart *Mercury*, 26 August 2017) A Sunshine Coast newspaper describes the process of making one:

Served in a small vessel. Start with a double ristretto base, add a small amount of milk. ‘It’s basically 50% coffee and 50% milk, served not too hot, and that’s called a Magic.’ (Caloundra Weekly, 4 June 2015)

Now that the magic is on our radar, we will be watching to see if it becomes more widely used in Australia, and worthy of an entry in our dictionaries.

Magic will be considered for inclusion in the next edition of the *Australian National Dictionary*.

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