

FEATURES

A whole lotta Latte

Coffee lovers can be notoriously picky about what constitutes a good cup of coffee, whether it be a tiny espresso or a big, frothy latte. To serve this growing crowd of coffee connoisseurs, a vast array of coffee shops have sprung up around Taipei. As a result it has become increasingly difficult to tell the good from the merely indifferent, and the Taipei City Government, following on the success of event such as the Taipei International Beef Noodle Festival (台北牛肉麵節), has initiated the "Coffee and Taipei, Memory and Glory" Taipei Specialty Coffee Festival (咖啡記憶 臺北時光 — 2008臺北精品咖啡嘉年華) this year to celebrate Taipei's burgeoning coffeehouse culture.

The festival has been created in coordination with the recently established Taipei Specialty Coffee Association (台北精品咖啡商業發展協會) led by Cho Wei-min (卓偉民). One of the main events of the festival was an Internet poll of Taipei's best coffee shops. This was followed by a review by Cho and other industry judges to select the best 30 coffee shops in Taipei.

Most of the stores are boutique coffee establishments. Selection was primarily based on the quality of the coffee, the professional knowledge of staff, as well as things such as hygiene, service and atmosphere.

"Chains such as Starbucks and Barista [西雅圖咖啡] have done a lot to develop the growth of coffee culture in Taiwan. They have put a lot of energy into educating the public," Cho said in an interview at the association's Tasting Room. "Because they are well-funded chain stores, they can set up in busy areas,

promoting coffee as something exotic and attractive. They created a foundation for coffee culture in Taiwan."

Some of the coffee shops selected, such as the recently opened *Espressamente Illy* in Taipei 101, are relatively large commercial ventures that are notable as much for their up-market decor as their coffee, but many others are small operations run by people who have developed a fascination for coffee. "Running a coffee shop has become a dream for many people in Taipei," Cho said.

This dream, which sometimes does not take much account of knowledge or experience, is probably why there are so many bad and mediocre coffee shops around. One of the reasons for the competition is to give some exposure to those establishments that manage to stand out from the crowd. "The emphasis in these places is on the coffee itself, not on the marketing," Cho said.

"In this competition, we wanted to give prominence to those establishments that represent coffeehouse culture ... that provide a place where people can relax and enjoy a cup of something special," Cho said. He added that professional knowledge about where the coffee beans come from, of different blends and of different preparations was what made people willing to pay a little extra and helped these smaller cafes survive. "With Internet ordering, it is now possible to get high-quality beans from overseas in relatively small amounts," Cho

said. "If you put it out [on the Internet] that you have obtained award-winning beans, you will certainly get coffee connoisseurs coming to your store to get a taste," Cho said. "There is no need to advertise."

An increasing number of coffee shops now roast their own beans, further diversifying the options for consumers. "There are probably 200 to 300 establishments in Taipei roasting their own beans," Cho said. "The advantage is freshness. Roasted beans retain their freshness for a very short time, just a few days. But of course, these small-volume roastings are sometimes less reliable in quality."

The test ultimately is in drinking the coffee, and this, of course, depends on who's making it. This afternoon at 1pm, a coffee brewing and tasting festival will be held at Taipei Water Park (台北自來水園區) located at 1 Siyuan St, Taipei City (台北市思源街1號). In addition to the competition, there will be a concert by band *Nan Quan Mama* (南拳媽媽) from 4:10pm, Southeast Asian music, samba dancing and lectures on fair-trade coffee and coffee culture. There will also be plenty of coffee to drink.

The list of 30 coffeehouses that Cho and his colleagues have come up with is far from comprehensive, and many coffee lovers may find a favorite establishment neglected, but it is certainly as good a starting point as any when in search of a cup of quality java.

The diversity of Taipei's burgeoning coffee culture is being celebrated today with a coffee brewing and tasting fest

BY IAN BARTHOLOMEW
STAFF REPORTER

FOR YOUR INFORMATION:

- >> To see the list of Taipei's best 30 coffee shops as named by industry judges, go to www.happier.org.tw/listTop30Store.asp
- >> Information about the Taipei Specialty Coffee Association can be found at www.taipeicoffee.org.tw
- >> For more details about today's coffee brewing and tasting festival at Taipei Water Park, visit www.taipei.gov.tw/cgi-bin/SM_theme?page=48aabe79



[FILM]

Ang Lee's current project has a backstory of pure serendipity

A chance encounter between the Oscar-winning director and Elliot Tiber resulted in 'Taking Woodstock,' which takes stock of the life of a closeted gay man

BY DAN BLOOM
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER, CHIAYI
Taiwan-born Hollywood director Ang Lee (李安), 53, is tackling a new movie project, a comedy this time, about America's famous Woodstock hippie music festival in 1969. Titled *Taking Woodstock*, the film's screenplay was written by longtime Lee collaborator James Schamus, 49, from a book by Elliot Tiber with the same title. Tiber's memoir was quietly published with little fanfare in 2007 by a small publisher in New York, but now the book, subtitled *A True Story of a Riot, a Concert, and a Life*, has become Lee's entree into the world of film comedy. It's tentatively set for a premiere in New York on June 26, 2009 — according to several movie Web sites — near the 40th anniversary of the 1969 Woodstock festival. The three-day concert took place in the middle of August of that year. Rudy Shur is the president of Square One Publishers, a book company in New York, which bought the book and released it in 2007 without really knowing if there was a Hollywood movie in it. But 10 months after publication, a movie deal was signed with Focus Features in New York. Focus Features is owned by NBC Universal,

with James Schamus serving as the independent studio's CEO. Tongues are already wagging on blogs and Web sites about what Lee's take on the Woodstock era will be like. The principal location shooting in upstate New York is set to be completed by the end of this month, according to *Variety* magazine, a film industry publication. In an e-mail interview about how the book and movie sale came about, publisher Shur, 62, explained the book's curious backstory. "Two friends of mine told me about a man they knew who had a very interesting and unique 'story' to tell, and they asked me to call him and see for myself if the memoir project — still unwritten — would make a good book. After talking to Elliot Tiber, now 72, and listening to his story about Woodstock in the '60s, I told him that it would make a terrific book, but that our book company usually didn't publish those types of memoirs and that he would be better off with a larger publishing house that had more experience and marketing clout." Despite Shur's advice to take his book project to a bigger publishing company, Tiber kept coming back to him and Shur finally said that he would take on the book, but with

Ang Lee poses with his Oscar for Best Director for *Brokeback Mountain*. His next movie is set to premiere in June 2009. PHOTO: AFP

the same earlier reservations he had expressed before. "I decided that maybe it was time to take a chance with this kind of book, and since it was my company, well, I would do as good a job as I could," Shur added. "So I called Elliot up and said 'Let's go for it.'" The book's genesis was complicated. "The story he wanted to tell was basically all Elliot, but to tell it in a manner that presented a balanced story in the way that I was looking for meant calling in a co-writer, Tom Monte," Shur said. "Elliot's normal writing style was very creative and stream-of-consciousness, but I wanted more of a traditional story narrative. I had worked with Monte before, so I signed him to put Elliot's material into the style I was looking for." Joanne Abrams, my senior editor, worked with Elliot to get his memoir into a more finalized form, and Monte did his magic with the book, too. When it was done, Elliot approved, and we had our book." The title of the book, and the movie, also has an interesting backstory. Shur said the title was



the brainchild of Square One's marketing director, Anthony Pomes. "We had lots of titles in mind, but *Taking Woodstock* seemed to fit best based on the story," Shur noted. "We felt the title meant two things: Taking stock of your life and, in a sense, control of your destiny — and also taking the experience of Woodstock, and what that cultural event meant, with you for the rest of your life." "Woodstock was a moment of freedom as well as a coming of age for a new generation in America," Shur added. "So we used that title for the book, and Lee and Schamus are

using it for the movie as well. We are delighted." The book's narrative reflects a young Elliot Tiber in his 20s who was on the brink of financial ruin at the time but who was also in a position to help pull off one of our generation's greatest rock concerts," Shur said. "I wanted to include some of the most important, yet overlooked, facts of the coming together of the concert, and Monte [Elliot's co-writer], having also lived through the period, was able to do just that." The story follows Tiber, who is gay but hid his sexual orientation from his family, and includes his participation in the Stonewall riot in New York, which helped fuel the gay-rights movement. When the book was first released, there were only a few reviews since Square One was not a large publisher and did not have the same kind of marketing clout as the larger book companies in New York. But the reviews were nevertheless positive, and slowly, word of mouth began to spread at book Web sites and blogs.

"We could see a real 'grass-roots' interest starting to build around the book," Pomes, the marketing director said. "The audience was growing week by week, and we felt we held a sleeper title that had what it took to turn into a winner." How the book became a Hollywood movie to be directed by an Academy Award winner is also a story that Shur tells with relish. "It will sound like a Hollywood myth, but it really happened this way," he said. "Tiber was scheduled to appear on a West Coast television show to promote the book, and while he was waiting in the green room to go on the show, who should sit down next to him, by pure chance, but Ang Lee." It turns out that Lee was also scheduled to appear on that same interview show to promote his latest film, *Lust, Caution* (色,戒). "Elliot," continues Shur, "introduced himself and spent the next hour chatting with him about his book." "Well, when Lee went on the show, the host finished the interview by asking Lee where he usually got his ideas from for his movies, and Lee said that he really doesn't go looking for stories, that they seem to come to him. And

with that he turned to Elliot, who was sitting across from him, and gave him a sly wink." "Nothing really happened until about five months later, when Lee had finally read the book," Shur said. "Lee and Schamus felt there was a movie here, and together they went to upstate New York to visit the Yasgur's Farm site where the Woodstock festival took place. Elliot joined them there at the site, and the project was in the can. The agents finalized the deal, everything was signed, and here we are. It looks like Lee was right: in this case, the next movie project really did just seem to come to him." When asked if he knew there was a movie in the book from the very beginning, Shur said: "I'll be honest with you. As we worked on the book, I knew that Elliot's story had the potential to make a great independent movie. It was like no other Woodstock story ever published. I believed that we could find a small independent producer who could turn the book into a film. However, in my wildest dreams I would have never thought it to be the likes of Ang Lee and James Schamus, two Academy Award winners who would take on the project. So far, it's been an amazing ride."