

Interview and story by Steve Agi and Scottie Callaghan

George Houvardas' Piato Café is 'Packed to the Rafters'

Although George's name may not roll off the tongue, he is one of Australia's finest up and coming talents and a key character in Seven's smash hit comedy, *Packed to the Rafters*. George is a Greek/Australian actor who is best known for his role as Nick 'Carbo' Karandonis, but he is also part owner of Piato Café and barista extraordinaire – as reigning Australian Barista Champion, Scottie Callaghan can testify.

George is a very unassuming and modest young man who doesn't take his celebrity status for granted – the morning after attending the Logies and partying with the likes of Jennifer Hawkins, he was back behind the espresso machine at the family owned and operated Piato Café churning out over 3kg of coffee, just in that session! With this sort of passion and enthusiasm I was more than happy to spend some time with George and his 'Coffee mentor', the one and only Scottie Callaghan, head trainer at Belaroma Coffee which supplies the café with its coffee. Since its partnering and deciding to focus on and assess the quality of each and every cup that is handed over to the all important customer, Belaroma Coffee has noticed a remarkable increase in sales.

I'm such a big fan of the show, and really think that 'Carbo' is such a great character. I am absolutely chuffed to get to meet you, thanks for taking time out and for your hospitality here at Piato.

Great to have you here. As you can see we are quite a busy little café, all thanks to the hard work and effort of not only my brothers Steve and Tony and the staff, but also Scottie Callaghan and the team at Belaroma who have been integral

in helping us to develop and explore opportunities. It's amazing just what a difference a bit of care and attention to quality can make.



Tell me George, where did your love affair with coffee begin, I mean where did you make your first coffee?

Funnily enough, it was at my brothers Tony and Steve's restaurant, Spilters. It was truly a defining moment, which really showed me just how amazing coffee can and should be. My favourite

was and still is a double espresso. I really enjoy a great coffee both at our own venues as well as at other cafés, nothing irks me more than a badly made coffee and a barista who is more interested in playing with his mobile phone or chatting with a co-worker about last night's footy, rather than focusing and concentrating on trying to prepare and serve the best possible beverage to each and every customer.

Have you found that the relationship with Belaroma and specifically Scottie has been beneficial to you and to your business?

Definitely, Scottie is one of a kind. I don't think he even knew who I was or cared for that matter when I walked into his training room, which was great. I learnt so much and we all learnt that coffee is crucial to the success of any café. It is what sets us apart from our competitors and the key point of difference to our customers so they can keep on coming back.

"You know what Steve," grins Scottie, "George is absolutely right, I had no idea who he was when I first met him, which in all honesty makes no difference anyway. Coffee for me is and always should be about passion, a true love affair with the bean, and let me tell you the Houvardas boys are very passionate guys who give it their all and have really doubled this business through hard





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work, dedication, persistence and effort. Consistency is the key and let me tell you there is a sea of consistent smiles from customers who are lucky enough to visit Piato.

That’s fabulous guys, thanks Scottie for shedding so much light on the secret to their success – but tell me George, what’s it like balancing life as a celebrity as well as a hard working café owner?

It’s all about balance Steve and remaining grounded, it’s really a matter of priorities and knowing who you are. Fortunately I’ve had a great upbringing and am part of a close knit family, which for me is paramount. The values and priorities instilled in me as a kid while growing up have and will stay with me. Hard work, honesty and integrity are all crucial in any person’s life and tend to be even more so when living your life in the

public eye. The café for me is a bit of a reality check, to remind me of who I am and where I came from. It’s all well and good and I love the whole opportunity that has presented itself, but I hope that I never let it get to my head, I hope I never lose sight of who I am and what are the most important things in life.

Tell me George, any words of advice to those who like you are looking to travel the road of quality caffeination and foray into the world of café ownership?

Work hard and love what you do, it shows if you don’t. This is a lifestyle choice not a job, so make sure you choose wisely otherwise you will never be able to be all you can be. Don’t try to cut corners or compromise and above all listen to your peers and those in the know. People like Scottie and the team at Belaroma have been so valuable to

our growth and development, they were key components of the success we have experienced over the course of business.

Now for all of those non-Greeks, why have you gone and called your cafe Piato, what does that mean?

Oh Steve, you’re a cheeky one, ‘piato’ is Greek for plate and that is exactly what we like to present to our customers – a plate full of quality, of love and of the passion which we try to infuse into all of our offerings. Sounds a bit corny I know, but it honestly is what we believe and how we try to deal with each and every person who visits our humble café.

Thanks so much to George and to Scottie Callaghan for their time and energy. When you’re near McMahons Point in NSW, be sure to check out Piato – you won’t be disappointed.



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