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One for the fans ... Craig Hiron made the Otto machine for those who love the coffee-making ritual. Photo: Fiona Morris

Salute to the Atomic age

CRAIG HIRON loves his Atomic coffee machine. For more than a decade, he has made coffee in his kitchen using the famous Italian-designed stove-top machine that revolutionised at-home coffee when it was invented in the late 1940s.

If it weren't for one very bad week, Hiron's Atomic would still be little more than a morning ritual.

"It was a real palms-in-the-air moment," he says of a disastrous week five years ago that left him with no job, no car, no place to live, no money and no girlfriend and persuaded him to leave his career as a roofing contractor and steer his life towards creating a homage to his beloved coffee maker.

Four years of rigorous designing and testing with Sydney-based industrial designers Tiller Design followed. Hiron toyed with many

plans and examined the innards of the classic Atomic machine in depth. He stood in the kitchen of coffee guru and Belaroma founder Ian Bersten for hours testing brews made on different prototypes. A professor of thermodynamics also consulted on the machine's delivery of water, steam and pressure.

The result is the Otto Stove Top Espresso Maker; a meticulously engineered, super-sleek design that makes two cafe-quality cups of coffee. Hiron stresses that it's not an improvement on the Atomic but rather a polished, modernised and invigorated tribute.

"I was so adamant that I had to do it perfectly because the Atomic is such an icon that if I didn't get it right I'd get absolutely butchered," he says. "The coffee was the basis for the machine. Every change was

made to make the coffee better."

A World Barista Championship judge, Emily Oak, has praised the machine's design, saying it makes consistent, high-quality coffee. "The texture and flavours it extracts from the coffee is unique, unlike any other brewing method," she says.

Much like the Atomic, the Otto is for coffee drinkers and gadget-lovers who relish the ritual of making a morning cup.

"It's for people who'll spend 10 minutes striving towards two perfect cups of coffee," Hiron says. "It's not a push-button machine that you'll get home and make a perfect coffee the first time but it's all about the coffee experience."

Rachel Olding

The Otto retails for \$800. See www.ottoespresso.com.