

◀ White Rock Coffee has used Unic machines at its stores across Dallas since 2013.

Specialty pioneers

As the United States' specialty scene continues to go from strength to strength, White Rock Coffee in Texas has scaled up its business with the help of espresso machine manufacturer Unic.

WHEN WHITE ROCK COFFEE founders Bob and Nancy Baker started roasting ethically sourced, specialty-grade coffee in 2005, the cappuccinos, lattes, and iced coffees they served were a new concept in their North Dallas neighbourhood.

"What Bob and Nancy were offering was a unique idea at the time," says Wesley Ballard, Director of Coffee Education and Creative Operations at White Rock Coffee.

"Most people got their coffee from diners and grocery stores, so a coffee shop that roasted its own beans and sought to educate customers was an original offering."

The United States' (US) specialty coffee scene was still in its infancy and the Bakers had tapped into the burgeoning market just before it really started to gain momentum in the early 2010s. According to Mario Flores, Owner of Unic distributing partner JavaTec LLC, it was around this time he started to witness a huge shift in the coffee industry.

"In the US, coffee is very much on the upswing and has been for many years. Specialty has blown up as an industry and

is a very important part of our society now," Flores says.

"The specialty market here in Dallas really started to take off around 2010. As an industry, we've been working towards the pinnacle of coffee for many years."

As an early adopter of the specialty movement, White Rock Coffee soon gained a following and its popularity resulted in expansion. Today, across Dallas the brand has seven cafés, a dedicated roastery serving its own venues plus wholesale and retail customers, an in-house bakery, and a Specialty Coffee Association Premier Training Campus lab – all fitted out with Unic multi-boiler platforms.

Flores introduced the White Rock Coffee team to the European espresso machine specialist, first coming across the brand at the 2011 Specialty Coffee Expo.

"When I first saw the Unic Stella Di Caffé I was a little reluctant. But, I was intrigued by the machine and after seeing it in action thought the way it produced shots was phenomenal. It was way ahead of its time compared to the rest of the market," he says.

Flores became an early adopter of Unic in

the US, championing the platform as being "very fundamental and robust". In 2013, he convinced Bob Baker and the White Rock Coffee team to give the Stella Di Caffé a go at its first drive-thru venue. While most of the fleet have now been upgraded to the newer Stella Epic models, they haven't looked back on their decision and credit both Unic and Flores with making the process of expanding their business much smoother.

"The thing that's most important to us as we grow is ensuring our customers receive a consistent level of quality, whichever venue they visit," says Ballard.

"Having a machine that's reliable, consistent, and ultimately something we don't have to worry about means we can focus on the customer experience. Everyone is winning, because the Unic machines deliver great-tasting coffee and the customers receive great service from our team."

Ballard says the Stella Epic's standardised and easy-to-follow operating procedure makes training staff for new locations straightforward, as he can mimic the

workflow from an identical machine at the White Rock training lab and roll it out across venues.

“The user interface is very simple to use. There are some systems on other machines that look really cool, but ultimately they can be difficult to manipulate. The Stella Epic is very adaptable – for example, if you want to change the profile you can do it in just a few steps,” he adds.

Flores credits the Unic machines as a key driver of White Rock Coffee’s success over the past decade.

“Scalability is directly related to the quality of the espresso machine you have, the quality of the product you serve, and the quality of the water you put into it,” he says.

“When we managed to get the Bakers to buy into the idea that a high-level machine and high-level water is going to help them drive their business, it was a game changer.”

Something both Ballard and Flores are impressed by is the Unic machines’ longevity. In fact, the original Stella Di Caffé machine still sits on the bar of White Rock’s drive-thru to this day and pulls espresso as smoothly as the morning it was installed over 10 years ago, thanks to Javatec’s regular servicing.

“Unic machines are workhorses. The sheer volume they can handle is hugely impressive,” Ballard says. “Having a machine that is consistent over time and at high volumes has allowed us to elevate the quality of our coffee, which is what we’ve become known for.”

As the coffee quality has continued to rise, Ballard has enjoyed exploring various profiles and extractions, and says the Stella Epic has helped him discover new avenues of flavour potential.

“The Epic has been my favourite addition to our systems simply because of the amount of variables we get to play with and the level of control I have over the flavour,” he says.

Flores explains that the technology within the Stella Epic differs from other profiling concepts by utilising a secondary valve system to pulse profile extractions and achieve the unique taste profiles baristas are looking for.

“I honestly believe a lot of that taste profile can be manipulated via a series of pulses. We’re achieving great shots in a more predictable and stable manner than many other brands,” he says.

In a market that favours milk-based beverages, Flores also highlights the Stella

Epic’s advanced steaming capabilities.

“They call the US market the milkmen for a reason. We go through so much milk that it’s essential to have a machine with extra steaming capacity. The Stella Epic has unbelievable amounts of steam capability thanks to its 6000-watt heat element over an average-size boiler, which gives it an advantage over so many other brands,” he says.

Ballard agrees and says that local baristas attending White Rock throwdowns often

comment on just how easy it is to steam milk on the Unic machines.

Both Ballard and Flores only see the specialty scene in the US continuing to expand, which could spell additional White Rock Coffee venues – and more Unic machines – popping up across Dallas in the future. **GCR**

For more information, visit
unic-espresso.com/en/



► Distributor Mario Flores says the Unic Stella Epic’s steaming capability serves America’s appetite for milk-based drinks.