FOURTEEN EAST

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PHOTO · VARUN KHUSHALANI

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COVER STORY



GOOD COFFEE
GOOD PEOPLE

A tale from the owners of Coffee Lab & Roasters, and how a Lakeview shop became a small test of work, care, ownership, and community.

BY KIKI DYBALL · PHOTOGRAPHY / IMAGES TO BE ADDED

COVER STORY

In the days before Christmas, Josie Langevin and Luke Cason were on their way to Ohio when a halt-joking idea became something real. Cason texted his boss and asked if they would sell Coffee Lab & Roasters to them. It was bold, almost impulsive, but the question opened a door neither of them had fully expected. At the time, both were young, working, and looking for a life that felt less stalled. Cason had studied biochemistry, but the lab work he found himself doing felt miserable. Coffee became a different kind of lab for him: a place where routine, craft, and people could actually meet.By spring 2023, the two were no longer just imagining ownership. They were living it.



Coffee Lab & Roasters, Lakeview. Photo credit to be added.

"I never really thought about owning a business because I've always hated the idea of the business owner corporate."



SIDEBAR IDEA: Ownership is designed here as a quiet pressure system - love, labor, money, community, and time all sitting inside one small room.

FROM BARISTAS TO OWNERS

The story is not only about coffee, but about the strange pressure of turning a familiar workplace into a business that suddenly depends on you. Langevin and Cason had to learn accounting, staffing, equipment problems, scheduling, and the emotional weight of being both partners at home and owners at work.

That shift changed the meaning of the shop. It was no longer just a job or a place to make drinks. It became a shared responsibility, one that required them to protect their relationship, their employees, and the everyday rhythm of the neighborhood.

A SMALL SHOP WITH A LARGER SOCIAL LIFE

PEOPLE

Coffee Lab is described through its people as much as through its drinks. The article keeps returning to the relationships between owners, workers, regulars, and the surrounding Lakeview community.



Park, smiling as usual. Photo by Kiki Dyball.

Einah Park becomes one of the clearest examples of the shop's culture. After the ownership change, she worried about whether the new dynamic would alter the friendship and trust she had built with Cason. Instead, she was reassured that the relationship could stay human, even as the business structure changed.

A WORKING TIMELINE OF COFFEE LAB

SIDEBAR

Oct. 2022
Cason and Park are hired.

Apr. 2023
Langevin joins the Lab.

May 2023
Langevin and Cason become owners.

Year One
Small team keeps the shop running.

2024
New hires and longer weekend hours.

Next
Cold brew and community growth.

KEY DETAILS TO DESIGN AROUND

OWNERSHIP
The story begins with a sudden ask and becomes a practical education in running a shop.

COMMUNITY
The shop is built through regulars, employees, and small repeated acts of care.

CRAFT
Kyoto-style cold brew and espresso give the shop a product identity.

WHAT MAKES A COFFEE SHOP LAST?

1. A recognizable drink or ritual.
2. Workers who remember people and make the place feel human.
3. A neighborhood that treats the shop as part of daily life.
4. Owners who can keep learning without losing the reason they started.



"Good coffee, good people."

- LUKE CASON, COFFEE LAB & ROASTERS

COVER STORY · CONTINUED



Coffee Lab sits among several other coffee shops within a short walk, but the article does not frame that as pure competition. Instead, Langevin and Cason describe the local coffee scene as something more collaborative, a small ecosystem where different shops can each offer something distinct.

That detail matters because it changes the story from a simple business profile into a story about neighborhood culture.

The writing also makes the physical space feel specific: a cream-toned exterior on North Lincoln Avenue, simple black lettering, pastries behind glass, local art on the walls, and the smell of coffee and baked goods inside. Those details make the shop feel less like a concept and more like an actual room someone could walk into.

"We're just there to make a snippet of someone's day better however we can."

THE SHOP IN SMALL NUMBERS

2023

The year Langevin and Cason became Coffee Lab's owners.

7-1

The limited hours the small team ran before expanding.

8 HRS

The slow drip time behind Kyoto-style cold brew.

After a year of ownership, the article suggests that the shop is still becoming itself. Langevin says the learning is continuous, and that line gives the story its real shape. Nothing is presented as perfectly solved. The business is still being adjusted, the recipes are still being refined, and the owners are still figuring out how much of themselves the shop can hold.





Union Park, Chicago. The morning after.

Photo: Varun Khushalani

To invoke 1968 in the summer of 2024 is to make a particular kind of argument. It is to say: what is happening now is of that magnitude. It is to say: the establishment is failing a generation. It is to say: we will not be silent, and we will not be forgotten. Whether that comparison holds - whether the Gaza conflict of 2024 is, in fact, to this generation what Vietnam was to another - is a question history will answer slowly.

CONCLUSION

"This is our Vietnam. And like Vietnam, history will decide whether we were right."

ABOUT THIS STORY

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