

Special Edition • 2025 — 2050

FUTURE BREW

Creative foresight-infused strategy for an upstart value-driven coffee business

Created By

Sarah Brooks, James Holcombe
Phong Huynh, Jeremy Irwins, Philip Jones

Course

Advanced Strategies
University of Houston

Client

zoé



Project Overview

ZOE Coffee, a small family business, wasn't a traditional foresight client. Their business and personal futures were intertwined. Our strategy was to introduce them to the world of futures, map possible industry scenarios, and provide evocative, personal tools to inform their strategic decisions.



Why This Project is Unique

Context

Understanding the unique constraints and opportunities of Zoe Coffee was essential to crafting a strategy that would actually be adopted.



Founder-Led Side Hustle

The business is still a passion project for the founders. Strategic directions are fluid, resources are limited, and the "corporate" playbook doesn't apply.



Deeply Values-Driven

Education, Legacy, and Equity are not just marketing terms—they are non-negotiables. Any strategy must amplify these core convictions.



Foresight Novices

With no formal exposure to strategy or futures thinking, the client needed accessible, tangible tools rather than abstract academic frameworks.

The Zoe Way

Client



From Legacy to Leadership: Founded by Adriano and Cynthia Silva in the UAE, Zoe Coffee began as a tribute to Mr. José Eudes' 40-year legacy in Brazil. It evolved from a boutique importer into a global social enterprise proving that business can be a force for good.



Education as Empowerment

Established the Zoe Coffee Institute to train the next generation of professionals. Profits fund scholarships for farmers' children, ensuring access to opportunity.



Preserving Legacy

Created a living archive of traditional knowledge while embracing innovation. From blockchain traceability to climate-adaptive farming, they honor the past by securing the future.



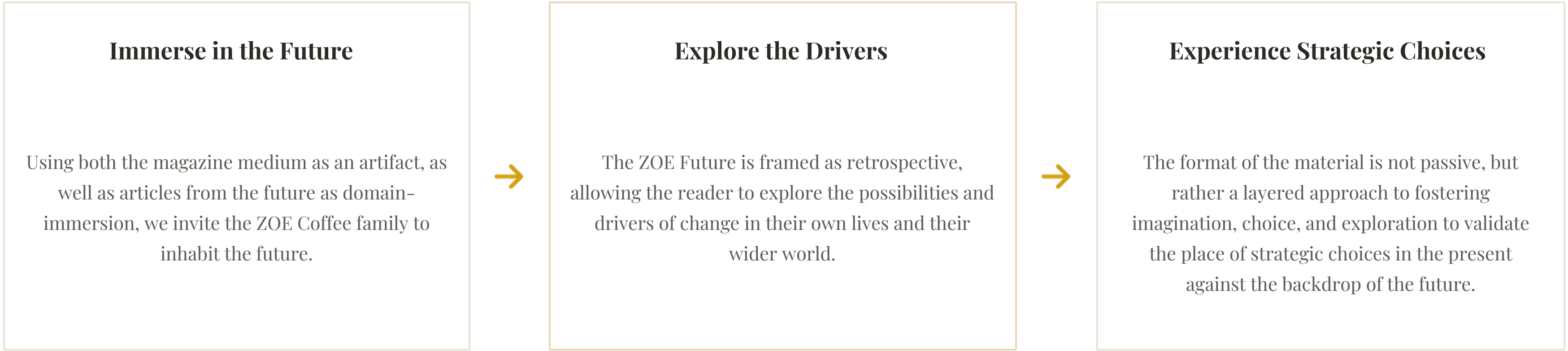
A New Vision of Fair Trade

Beyond certification: Direct partnerships with stable premium pricing and direct investment in community infrastructure like schools and healthcare.

Activating The Future for ZOE Coffee

Considerations

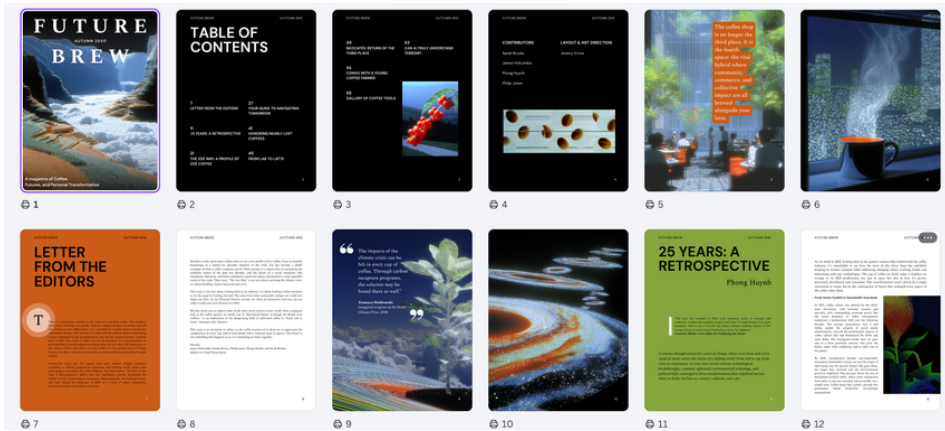
The magazine and its content were borne from ZOE Coffee’s immediate strategic questions: “What do we want to become?” and “What does that look like in the face of uncertain futures?” The content represented both personal and domain questions.



What We Did Differently

Approach

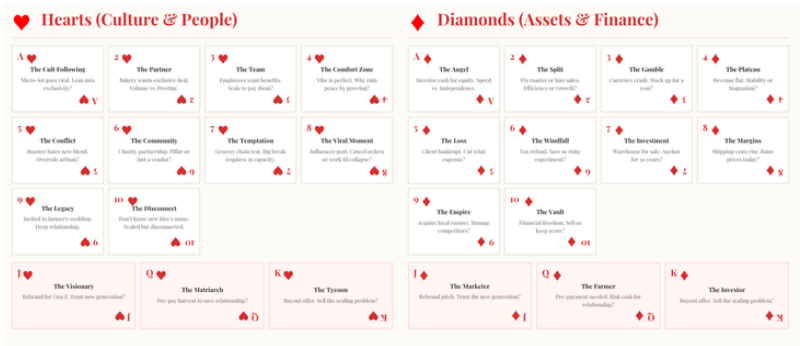
Instead of a traditional strategic roadmap, we created an immersive experience that bridges the gap between personal vision and business reality.



Tangible Artifact

We moved beyond PowerPoint to create a physical magazine from the future. This tangible object engages the senses and makes the preferred future feel real and attainable.

Click [here](#) to view FULL MAGAZINE



Personal Foresight

Recognizing that the founders *are* the business, we integrated personal futures tools. The vision for the company is inseparable from their personal journey.

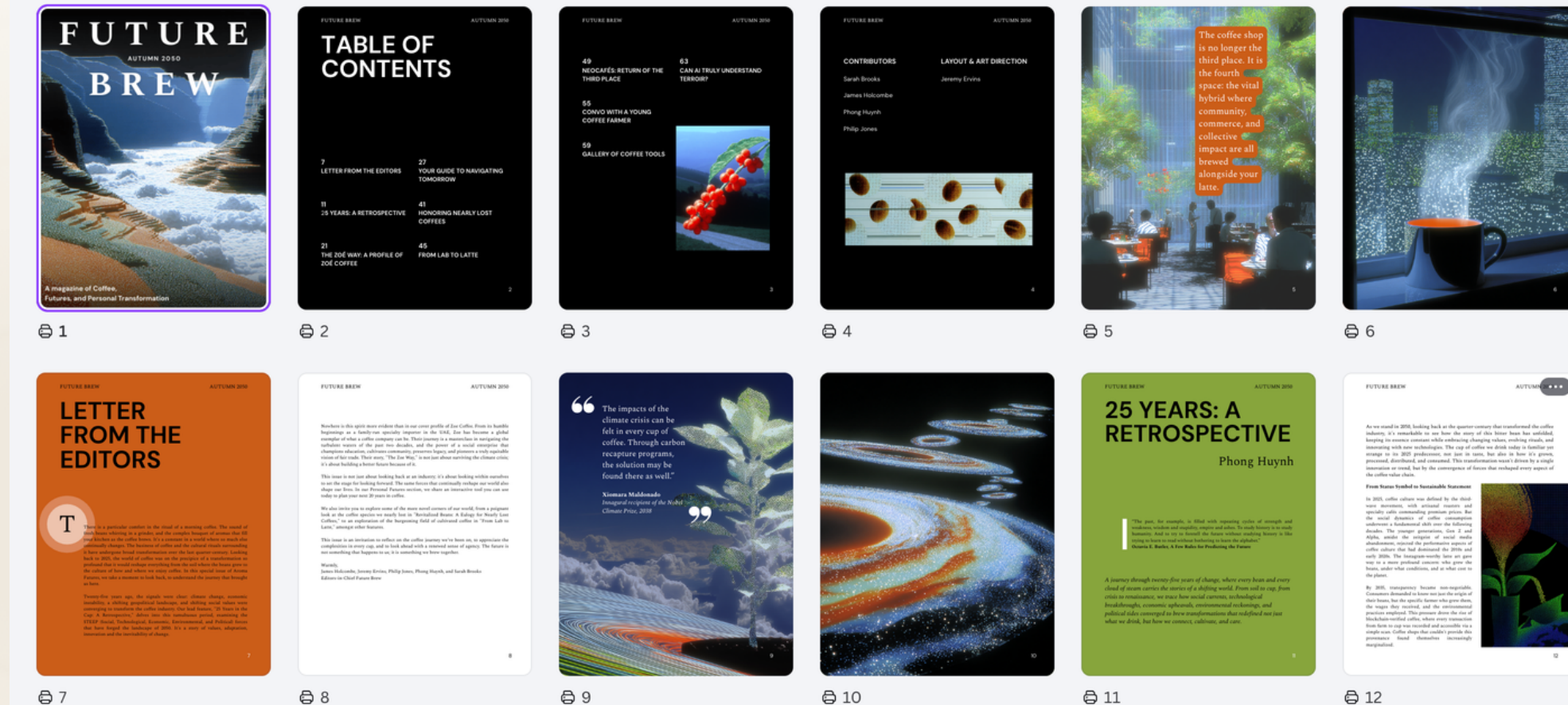


Adaptive Strategy

Rather than a rigid plan, we developed an organic strategy that weaves external uncertainties with internal convictions, allowing the business to find its place naturally.

Artifact Excerpts

The futures experience was delivered through a 66 page magazine from the future, containing the immersive exercises, futures research framed as retrospective, and an immersive journey through the domain futures, personal futures, and the very act of foresight. This section explores some of that material, including the interactive game and scenario images reflecting key themes of importance to the ZOE Coffee family.



25 Years of Transformation

Drivers of Change

 From (2025) Status Symbol Performative consumption, latte art, and third-wave exclusivity.	 To (2050) Sustainable Statement Radical transparency, micro-activism, and cafés as social enterprises.
 From (2025) Curation of Nature Emerging precision agriculture and traditional cultivation.	 To (2050) Precision Technology Drone swarms, AI optimization, and cellular agriculture (15% market share).
 From (2025) Middlemen Commodity trading systems that enriched intermediaries.	 To (2050) Direct Relationship Fair Trade 2.0, living wages, and direct farmer-to-consumer models.
 From (2025) Survival Existential threat with 50% of land unsuitable for growing.	 To (2050) Resilience & Restoration Regenerative agriculture, carbon neutrality, and climate-resilient varieties.
 From (2025) Trade Wars Disputes and fragmented regulatory frameworks.	 To (2050) Coffee Diplomacy International cooperation and the "Coffee Model" of climate finance.

Navigating Tomorrow: The Game

Game

Experiencing the future is a great way to activate it in decision making. We designed a game to allow our ZOE friends the opportunity to feel the future in a personal, immersive way.



Define Your Strategy

Write down your strategic objective for the next 15 years (e.g., "Expansion to new markets"). Identify your specific hypothesis for success and the first action you will take.



Play the Hand

Draw cards from a standard deck. Each card represents a scenario prompt. Journal your response in the first person: How does this change your future? How do you feel?



Review the Story

After 5 cards, review the narrative arc. Does your strategy hold up against these futures? What lessons can you translate to your present decisions?

The Deck: Red Suits (Internal Pull)

Game

♥ Hearts (Culture & People)

A♥
The Cult Following
Micro-lot goes viral. Lean into exclusivity?
♥V

2♥
The Partner
Bakery wants exclusive deal. Volume vs. Prestige.
♥z

3♥
The Team
Employees want benefits. Scale to pay them?
♥€

4♥
The Comfort Zone
Vibe is perfect. Why ruin peace by growing?
♥†

5♥
The Conflict
Roaster hates new blend. Overrule artisan?
♥€

6♥
The Community
Charity partnership. Pillar or just a vendor?
♥9

7♥
The Temptation
Grocery chain test. Big break requires 3x capacity.
♥L

8♥
The Viral Moment
Influencer post. Cancel orders or work til collapse?
♥8

9♥
The Legacy
Invited to farmer's wedding. Deep relationship.
♥6

10♥
The Disconnect
Don't know new hire's name. Scaled but disconnected.
♥OI

J♥
The Visionary
Rebrand for Gen Z. Trust new generation?
♥I

Q♥
The Matriarch
Pre-pay harvest to save relationship?
♥O

K♥
The Tycoon
Buyout offer. Sell the scaling problem?
♥K

♦ Diamonds (Assets & Finance)

A♦
The Angel
Investor cash for equity. Speed vs. Independence.
♦V

2♦
The Split
Fix roaster or hire sales. Efficiency or Growth?
♦z

3♦
The Gamble
Currency crash. Stock up for a year?
♦€

4♦
The Plateau
Revenue flat. Stability or Stagnation?
♦†

5♦
The Loss
Client bankrupt. Cut what expense?
♦€

6♦
The Windfall
Tax refund. Save or risky experiment?
♦9

7♦
The Investment
Warehouse for sale. Anchor for 30 years?
♦L

8♦
The Margins
Shipping costs rise. Raise prices today?
♦8

9♦
The Empire
Acquire local roaster. Manage competitors?
♦6

10♦
The Vault
Financial freedom. Sell or keep score?
♦OI

J♦
The Marketer
Rebrand pitch. Trust the new generation?
♦I

Q♦
The Farmer
Pre-payment needed. Risk cash for relationship?
♦O

K♦
The Investor
Buyout offer. Sell the scaling problem?
♦K

Future Brew

The Deck: Black Suits (External Push)

Game

♠ Spades (Risks & Market)

A♠ The Freeze Frost kills 40% of crop. Eat cost or pass it on? ♥V	2♠ The Copycat Cheaper rival appears. Ignore or price war? ♥z	3♠ The Regulation New FDA tracking. Do it yourself or hire consultant? ♥€	4♠ The Drought Rain is late. Hoard cash for thin harvest? ♥†
5♠ The Review Critic says "overpriced." Defend or lower price? ♥£	6♠ The Ally Competitor closes. Market to them or wait? ♥9	7♠ The Rumor Port strike rumors. Panic-buy inventory now? ♥L	8♠ The Pivot Tastes shift to Robusta. Chase trend or stick? ♥8
9♠ The Crisis Political instability. Supply cut off indefinitely. ♥6	10♠ The Collapse Shipping rates triple. Radically change business? ♥OI		
J♠ The Courier Route gone. Trust unproven carrier? ♥I	Q♠ The Inspector Minor infraction. Fight it or settle? ♥O	K♠ The Titan Climate shifts region. Move or quit? ♥K	

♣ Clubs (Operations & Logistics)

A♣ The Logjam Customs hold. Air-freight or tell customers "out"? ♣V	2♣ The Weak Link No bags. Delay orders or ship generic? ♣z	3♣ The Grind Manual fulfillment overload. Sustainable? ♣€	4♣ The Routine Complacency. Describe a small mistake. ♣†
5♣ The Breakdown Equipment failure. How much money lost? ♣£	6♣ The Helper Automation software. Save time vs. overhead? ♣9	7♣ The Bottleneck No shelf space. Move (expensive) or cap orders? ♣L	8♣ The Sprint Holiday overtime. Revenue vs. Health? ♣8
9♣ The Machine Impersonal ops. Miss the craft? ♣6	10♣ The Bureaucracy Red tape for \$50. Efficiency worth it? ♣OI		
J♣ The Driver Route gone. Trust unproven carrier? ♣I	Q♣ The Gatekeeper Minor infraction. Fight it or settle? ♣O	K♣ The Hurricane Climate shifts region. Move or quit? ♣K	

The Cup in 2050

Preferred Future



Sustainability

Grown in regenerative soil, carbon-negative, and biodiversity-positive. A brew that heals the planet.



Equity

Sourced via direct trade with living income pricing. A cup that supports the dignity of its maker.



Precision & Soul

Roasted with AI precision to unlock the full potential of its terroir. A flavor profile of unprecedented clarity.

Honoring Nearly Lost Coffees

Headlines from the Preferred Future | Heritage

"The rich tapestry of coffee has thinned... Here we pause to remember a few of the unique varieties that almost vanished."

The Maragogipe "Blue Mountain"

Known as the "Elephant Bean" for its massive size. A Typica mutation from El Salvador with notes of honeysuckle, milk chocolate, and toasted almond. Saved from the great drought of '34.

The Harrar "Wild Horse"

A semi-wild Ethiopian heirloom with jammy blueberry notes and wine-like acidity. Foraged by small communities, it nearly disappeared as its native ecosystem withered.

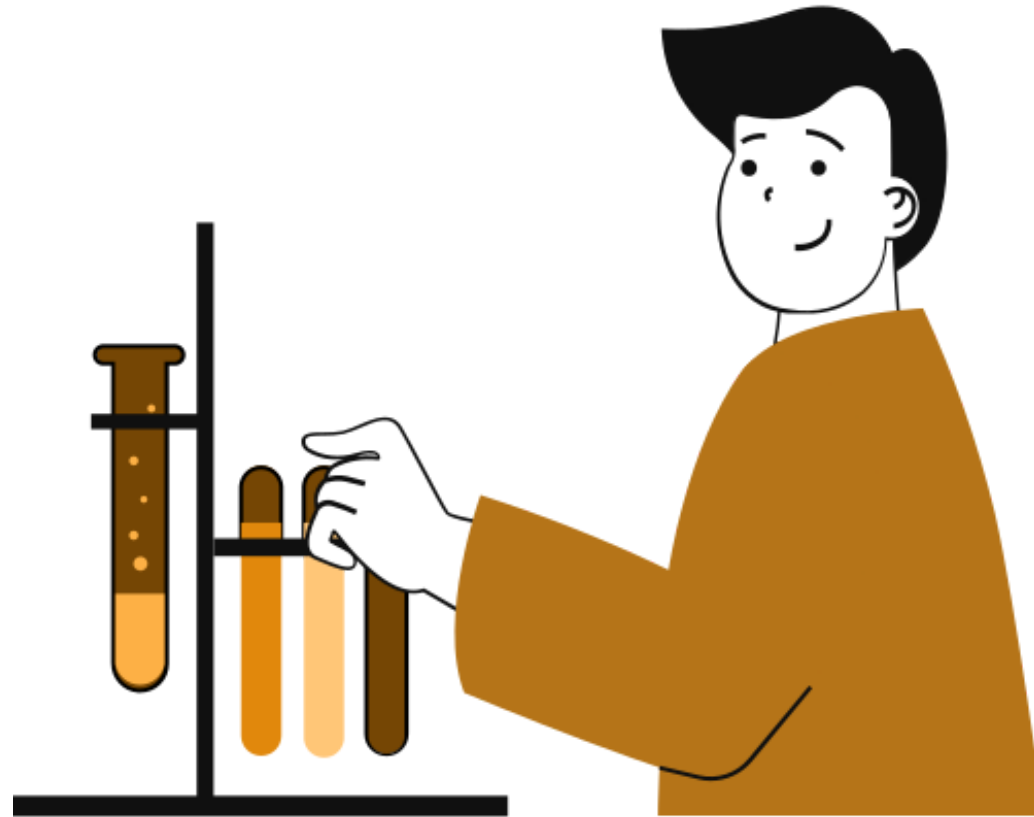
The Pacamara "Black Honey"

A Nicaraguan hybrid processed with mucilage intact. Famous for its syrupy mouthfeel and complex flavors of black cherry and molasses.



From Lab to Latte

Headlines from the Preferred Future | Innovation



"We are not creating a new kind of coffee. We are creating a new way to grow it."

The Process

Cellular agriculture begins with a single tissue sample. Inside sterile bioreactors, cells multiply and differentiate, forming the same chemical compounds—oils, acids, sugars—that give coffee its soul, without the need for soil or sun.

The Verdict

Blind taste tests reveal a "clean, consistent, B+ coffee." While it lacks the wild nuance of terroir, it is flawless and immune to climate shocks. By 2050, it powers our daily caffeine fix, allowing farm-grown coffee to thrive as a treasured luxury.

Return of the Third Place

Headlines from the Preferred Future | Culture

After decades of isolation fatigue, remote work, and AI displacement, the culture is rediscovering the simple joy of gathering.

NeoCafés like Brooklyn's "YellowBrick" are not just coffee shops; they are social ecosystems. Converted from empty parking lots, they serve as the new "third place"—a collaborative hub where AI consultants, students, and artists co-exist.

"We thought tech would replace community. Turns out it just changed where we find it."



Gallery of Coffee Tools

Headlines from the Preferred Future | Technology

Personal Roaster

The "Aura"

A silent, smokeless countertop device using magnetic induction and AI thermal mapping. Download profiles from top roasters or let the AI analyze your beans for a custom roast in under 10 minutes.

Self-Composting Mug

The "Myco"

A marvel of bioengineering with a base of engineered mycelium. Simply empty grounds into the lid, and the mug breaks them down into nutrient-rich compost. The ultimate circular design.

Concentrated Brewer

The "Essence"

Uses ultrasonic cavitation to instantly reconstitute hyper-concentrated coffee capsules. The result is indistinguishable from a fresh pour-over, preserving delicate aromatics without the wait.

Smart Water Kettle

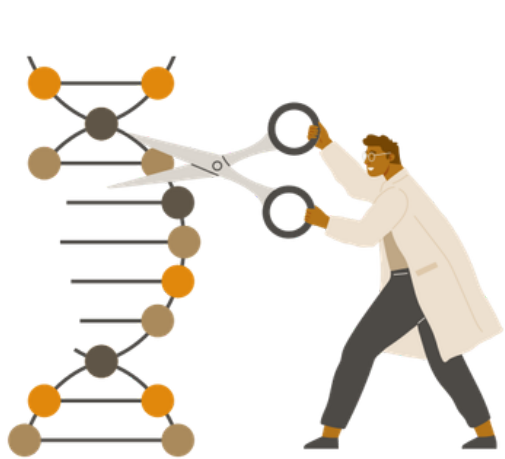
The "Terroir"

Analyzes water mineral content and adjusts it on the fly using an integrated cartridge. Replicates the specific water chemistry of a coffee's origin region for the perfect extraction.

Can AI Truly Understand Terroir?

Headlines from the Preferred Future | Debate

"The industry is divided. Is the perfect cup a formula to be solved, or a story to be told?"



The Scientist

Dr. Elias Thorne, Chief Agronomist

"Terroir is data. It is soil pH, rainfall patterns, altitude, and microbial density. AI can map it, predict it, and replicate it perfectly every time. We are not erasing nature; we are optimizing it."

The Artist

Isabella Rossi, Master Roaster

"Terroir is soul. It is the farmer's hands, the struggle of the season, the unpredictability of life. A machine can copy the flavor profile, but it cannot taste the history. It has no memory of the rain."

A Young Coffee Farmer

Headlines from the Preferred Future | Voices



Q: Why coffee in Wales?

"The belt moved. My grandfather grazed sheep here; I grow Geisha. The soil is waking up to a new purpose."

Q: What is the biggest challenge?

"Convincing the old guard that this isn't a hobby. We are building a new heritage from scratch, one harvest at a time."

Q: Your hope for 2050?

"That we stop fighting nature and start listening. That coffee becomes a partner in regeneration, not just a product to be extracted."

Elara Rhys, 24

Regenerative Farmer | Wales



"The story of coffee is the story of adaptation. In saving the bean, we learned how to save ourselves."

The transformation of the coffee industry serves as a blueprint for global resilience—proving that even in the face of existential threat, innovation and community can brew a better future.

The Future is Brewing