

Meet Craig Min and Jean Shim-Min – Lamill Coffee’s Remarkable Owners

CRAIG MIN

Craig Min was hooked on coffee at age 12. It would be 8 years before he had his first beer. Even that wouldn’t measure up to the brown elixir he discovered as a teen. Today, the only expensive imports he drinks are from Guatemala and Sumatra.

Min’s father started the family coffee business in 1991. A wholesale company, its primary clients were catering companies and restaurants. Min showed a keen interest in the business, and at age 14 was already helping to run the small company. While the rest of his friends were learning to drive, Min was in the stockroom organizing inventory and sitting in on meetings, learning everything he could about the business of coffee. To this day he can’t drive a stick shift.



Min took the reins to the company in 1998 and rechristened it Lamill Coffee. Sensing an opportunity, he began to approach smaller, high-end restaurateurs. That decision proved to be fruitful; Lamill now boasts a client list that includes such notables as Bastide, the Patina Group, and Michael Cimarusti’s award-winning Providence.

Not content with his success in coffee, Min opened a new company in the summer of 1999. Sungarden Tea has quickly garnered success as one of the largest specialty tea importers on the west coast.

Min credits the success of his companies to a simple formula of hard work, great employees and an unswerving commitment to just doing things better. “Ad agencies have ruined the word ‘quality’, not to mention a lot of my favorite songs,” says Min. “Quality still means something to us--that’s why we work so hard to get the details right. It’s what distinguishes us as a company.”

That attention to detail has netted Min a host of industry awards, including a Best of Los Angeles award for Best Coffee as well as a Food and Wine Tastemaker Award, which recently recognized Min as one of the top young talents who’ve changed the world of food and wine.

Innovation is another trait that distinguishes Lamill. Recognizing that each of his clients faced unique challenges, Min developed a comprehensive five-point program that could be customized to attend to the specific needs and budgets of any user.

When it comes to coffee, beans are of course, paramount. But great beans explains Min, “doesn’t necessarily equal great coffee. You need the right equipment, properly trained staff and constant monitoring to ensure consistently excellent coffee.”

The response to Lamill’s Coffee Care program has been extremely positive. Min believes his program and the level of service it provides to be unique to the industry.

Min's latest innovation brings Lamill into new territory. This fall, Min will open Lamill Coffee Boutique in fashionable Silver Lake. This will be Lamill Coffee's first retail store, and like everything else they do, the new shop promises to be anything but ordinary. For starters, they won't be serving up ordinary beans. Min has traveled extensively in preparation for the opening, in search of what he calls, "super high-end single origins prepared at the highest levels." Min's mission is to awaken his customers to a new world of possibilities for coffee and tea and he's designed the new Lamill Coffee Boutique to do just that.

To Min, innovation is more than just adding a flavor shot to an espresso drink. His aim is to completely reinvent coffee. "I've learned so many unique ways to prepare and serve and I plan to incorporate all of it. We're going to serve up some really creative flavor combinations. Our customers are going to take away a new vocabulary for coffee."

By using the absolute best ingredients and bringing in top artisans to prepare it, Lamill Coffee Boutique hopes to transform coffee from routine beverage into luxurious indulgence. "An affordable indulgence," says Min. "Our shop will be exclusive, but not exclusionary. Even the most thrifty person will find they can still afford a coffee here."

When he isn't busy expanding his company, Min spends time with his family. On the rare occasions when he has time to himself, Min enjoys ocean sports, downhill mountain biking, parachuting out of a plane or anything else that gets his heart racing. But coffee will always be Min's primary obsession.

"The sensation of tasting something delicious, and experiencing a whole new range of flavors—I love it. I'm passionate about it. Experiencing and tasting new types of coffee is like enjoying bottles of fine wine, without the hangover and incriminating photos."

JEAN SHIM-MIN

To those who know Jean Shim-Min, co-owner with husband Craig Min of Silver Lake's already-legendary Lamill Coffee Boutique, the popularity and success of Lamill's unusual dining concept – pairing gourmet coffee with gourmet food – comes as no surprise: Shim-Min has already made a name for herself as a pioneer in computer-generated advertising, marketing, graphic design and film.

Born in Corvallis, Oregon, Shim-Min grew up in Reno, Nevada, where she realized early in life she was gifted creatively. She moved East to Chicago to attend Wheaton College, and she graduated in 1991. She soon found a job in a small advertising firm outside Chicago, and the experience there helped her attain the Art Director position for a trade magazine at Putnam Publishing. She next moved to CBS, where she became an early leader in the new field of motion graphics.

Shim-Min built a reputation of expertise in the growing area of computer-generated graphics and animation, and before long she was again on the West Coast, this time working for a motion design firm that partnered with the major television networks in live action, 3D and 2D animation, promos and branding. Here she branched out into directing live-action pieces, and soon she began working with the rapidly-growing number of cable networks that mushroomed in the late 1990s. It wasn't long before her experience led her into the job of Creative Director of a New York company, responsible for getting its Los Angeles office up and running.

"I was really fortunate with the opportunities that came my way during the 1990s," Shim-Min recalls. "I entered a niche job market that taught me how to brand television shows and networks, much like what advertising does for products." It was the next step in her career that Shim-Min finally realized her dream: she started her own company, Shim Films.

Shim-Min's television contacts kept her new company busy, and soon she had offices both in the United States and overseas. "I was looking to transition Shim Films from television to independent film making," Shim-Min says, "but then the unexpected happened: I met my husband, Craig Min, and before I knew it, we were married and raising two small children!" With her family growing, Shim-Min decided it was best to downsize her company in order to focus on raising her children. "I never doubted for a moment that my time and focus was best spent where it belonged: on raising them," she says.



Spending more time at home allowed Shim-Min to become better acquainted with her husband's Lamill Coffee brand. "When I saw Lamill and the passion Craig had in creating it as a luxury brand, I knew I could help," Shim-Min remembers. "At that time, the company did not have a voice, and studying the other coffee brands, I knew I could work with Craig to differentiate Lamill from the rest."

She also wanted to inject her marketing expertise in rebranding Lamill's new tea wholesale company, Sungarden Specialty Tea.

In January 2008, Shim-Min and her husband were warmly embraced as they opened Lamill Coffee Boutique in the Silver Lake neighborhood of Los Angeles. Taking the coffeehouse concept to a new level, Lamill Coffee Boutique weds Lamill's unique luxury coffee brand with a gourmet food menu designed by local Michelin-starred chef Michael Cimarusti of Providence restaurant. Patrons enjoy a variety of coffee beverages, from slow extraction coffee by the cup and quality espresso available by the shot to signature beverages like Orange-Infused Cappuccino with Cacao and Liquid Tiramisu. The boutique also serves Cimarusti's gourmet creations throughout the day, including favorites such as Vegetarian Hens Eggs for breakfast and the Asian BLT, a hearty Panini of pork belly, arugula and tomato with preserved black beans, for lunch. Lamill's new dinner menu and dessert tasting menu were recently introduced and are served after 5:00 pm daily.

When asked how managing a busy boutique differs from running one's own film company, Shim-Min says she was surprised to discover that the two jobs really are not as different from each other as one might think. "I find the management skills I developed while running Shim Films are the same as those needed for running a boutique/restaurant," Shim-Min says. "It is all about matching each position with the best person available. I hire passionate, competent people and guide them to uphold our vision for Lamill with an eye on the bottom line."

Looking forward, Shim-Min and her husband continue to build the Lamill brand. April saw the opening of the Lamill Retail Store next door to the Silver Lake boutique, as well as the addition of the Barista Room for true coffee lovers looking for a spot for a dessert tasting, a private dinner or a special meeting (the Barista Room is fully equipped with multi-media equipment). Additionally, as the Mins start planning additional locations for more boutiques and retail stores to come, they are thrilled to have recently been named the official coffee purveyors to the ultra-exclusive Fontainebleau.

Jean Shim-Min's skillful management of the unique and remarkable Lamill product and brand is earning her praise among her peers in the business world, and it is clear that, if the past is any indication, the future is bright for Lamill Coffee and Jean Shim-Min.