



# Ariel Graham

CEO/PRESIDENT  
LOT 44 COFFEE



**“IT TAKES A VERY SPECIAL PERSONALITY, A UNIQUE PERSONALITY, TO HANDLE OWNING ONE’S OWN BUSINESS,”** says Ariel Graham, owner and guru of Lot 44 Coffee who just happens to have bucketloads of personality. “It’s very freeing and I am an adrenaline junkie.” And with all that lovely coffee around, adrenaline is not hard to come by in her bright, modern, and slightly futuristic shop in Downtown L.A.

For 16 years, Ariel has immersed herself in all aspects of the coffee industry. Starting out at The Abbey, “when it was still a coffee shop, and one of the few gay ones in the city at that,” she learned the ropes of café culture. But as the specialty coffee frenzy began to build in the U.S., she took a leap and found herself climbing the corporate ladder of Starbucks, which was leading the way to lattes on every corner.

As Starbucks became ubiquitous, and their per-cup quality began to suffer, Ariel took flight from corporate coffee and became a private consultant, opening coffee shops for other people. Then, one day, she realized it was time to take all the positive attributes she had learned over the years, mix in her own ideas, and distill them into her own brand, Lot 44.

Noticing that L.A. was finally emerging with its own specific coffee culture, with the openings and successes of places such as Intelligentsia and LAMill, Ariel opened Lot 44 earlier this year. “The culture is developing, like wine. Because coffee, like wine, does absorb the flavor of the earth and the grower.” But Lot 44 is unique and different from the aforementioned places, because Lot 44 is a “cup bar,” meaning that you, the customer, can pick any of the 15 coffee beans offered on the board and have it prepared as you like it—Chemex, French press, drip, or espresso. For coffee connoisseurs, or just those who love a great cup, this is manna from heaven.

If you know coffee, then you know why a certain cup is going to be over \$5 and you will be excited to try it and shelling out a fiver for a singular cup of coffee is fine. But Ariel was smart on this point and balanced out the menu. “Coffee by the cup, people are not used to it [the price]. So I came up with some options for people who just want a good cup of coffee but are not willing to pay \$4 for a cup.” Per-cup prices start at \$2.25. “We are not exclusive, but we are upscale. I want to be accessible to everyone, eclectic and reflective to the community.”

And speaking of community, Ariel has big plans for the sunny quiet atrium space directly behind Lot 44. “The atrium is a common space and I want to reach out to the community and have events. Bring in artists, have a Day of the Dead celebration, a kids event, or gay speed dating and a mixer. I hope to bring some gay to downtown.” Her employees also have a stake in the company and its success, and part of her commitment is to treat them fairly with good wages and health benefits.

But back to the coffee... the day I stopped in, Ariel and her manager, Sandy, prepared a few small batch coffees for me that knocked my socks off. The Misty Valley Ethiopian in a French press—with its insanely vibrant fruit smell and palate—evoked notions of blueberry, strawberry, vanilla and dark chocolate. The La Alondra Colombian in a Chemex, then as a shot of espresso, wowed with its vegetal qualities (think beets and green beans) and honey-roasted aroma, especially when paired with the Artisan du Chocolate Fleur du Sel (also available at the shop).

“I have a passion for coffee. I get really excited about [it]. My commitment is called ‘relationship’ coffee,” Ariel says brightly while sipping the Ethiopian with me. “It’s Fair Trade and organic, I know the farms that the coffee came from, I know the farmer’s name, we are helping to enrich the farmer’s life.” This commitment makes her visibly excited—beyond the buzz of the coffee we are sipping—and I realize her passion is manifold, not just lip service. —MICHAEL SVOBODA

*Lot 44 is located at 257 S. Spring St., Suite 115. For more visit [www.lot44coffee.com](http://www.lot44coffee.com), or call 213?626-4646.*