



The world famous Brazilian coffee beans from 1951 Coffee.  
Photo by James Watson.

# 1951 COFFEE

## More Than Just Another Orange Cup

By A.K. Carroll

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Less a laptop farm and more a place dedicated to the plight of refugees.

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**A**s a minor-league humanitarian, I'm a bit of an evangelist when it comes to the importance of empathy and cultivation of compassion. But in a culture that's rife with "thoughts and prayers," it's refreshing to see people put practical effort behind philanthropic intentions. People like Doug Hewitt and Rachel Taber, former employees of the International Rescue Committee and founders of 1951 Coffee Company, a nonprofit Berkeley coffee shop that's more than just another caffeine house.

Located on Channing Way in a space adjacent to First Presbyterian Church, 1951 aims to serve the local community, from Cal students looking for a study spot to tech workers grabbing a latte on the go. On the other side

of the doors, you'll find Verve coffee, Algorithm cold brew, Blue Willow tea, Starter Bakery pastries, and the hustle that's typical of a local coffee shop. You'll also find something a little less expected — a narrative that encourages empathy. The fact that the space serves as point of engagement means the atmosphere is one of understanding and exploration as much as a buzzy workspace or social hot spot.

It's a difference you'll notice straight away. There are no reclaimed barstools, exposed ceilings, or white-washed walls to set the mood. Yet every aspect of the design, which was essentially done pro bono by an eclectic Norwegian company called Montaaq, is intentional, starting with the red, green, yellow, and blue lines that run along the floor and up the wall. Reminiscent of the transportation routes that bring many refugees to the U.S., the lines direct your attention to the register then lead you through a hypothetical narrative, which is emblazoned on the walls. The story represents that of a typical refugee who resettles in the United States. It's a story made immediately real by the staff of the café, eight baristas from seven countries, all of whom have their own resettlement tale to tell.

That was Hewitt and Taber's intent from the start — not just to raise awareness, but to actually make a difference in the lives of Bay Area refugees. Named after the 1951 UN convention that defined the status of refugees and called for

