

National Geographic offers buzz on coffee

For many of us, life without coffee is unthinkable.

The special "Coffee: Beans to Buzz" (9 p.m., National Geographic) presents a fact-filled survey history of the popular stimulant. "Buzz" does a particularly good job of explaining how coffee and culture converge.



Kevin McDonough

Europeans were introduced to the brew by Arab armies laying siege to Vienna. Most agree that coffee has ancient origins in Ethiopia.

"Buzz" shows how Italians came up with espresso and cappuccino and how coffee stimulated both the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Apparently, when writers and thinkers substitute coffee for gallons of wine, they are much more productive.

While coffee flourished in Paris, Italy and Vienna, the drink earned an unwholesome reputation in England. Women, or at least wives, were banned from British coffee houses. But many had brothels available right upstairs. For this reason, among others, tea became the respectable, domestic beverage of choice.

Americans embraced coffee after the famous Boston Tea Party, when the consumption of that highly taxed item became a sign of Tory sympathies.

"Buzz" also presents short stories about corporate coffee giants like Maxwell House, Folgers and the coining of the phrase "Good to the Last Drop."

Apparently, advertising and technology conspired to make Americans drink billions of gallons of horrible coffee (much of it instant) in the decades after World War II.

Blame it on Juan Valdez! Much is made of Starbucks and its enthusiasts and critics and recent efforts to promote fair-trade coffee.

"The Final 24" (10 p.m., Biography) takes a moment-by-moment approach to the final day of a person's life. The series debuts with the "Final 24" hours of John Belushi's life.

"The Dan Ho Show" (9 p.m., Discovery Health) takes a minimalist and spiritual approach to interior design, cooking and self-improvement.

Ho, a former chef in a celebrated Chicago restaurant, decided to change his life after suffering a seizure that he attributed to working too much, eating too much and cluttering his life with unessential material possessions.

He became a kind of anti-Martha Stewart and published Rescue magazine and the book "Rescue from Domestic Perfection" (Bullfinch, 2006).

Ho argues that in trying to decorate the "perfect" room or set the "right" table or obsess about the right wine or outfit, we lose ourselves and become less interesting and attractive to others.

I am curious to see what corpo-

rations will sponsor a show with such a healthy contempt for mindless consumption.

Tonight's other highlights

On two episodes of "CSI" (CBS, TV-14, V), a grim prediction from a professional prognosticator (8 p.m.), Catharine and Nick take a road trip (9 p.m.).

The gang see themselves on "Cops" on "My Name Is Earl" (8 p.m., NBC, TV-14).

Michael tries desperately to retain his vacation vibrations on "The Office" (8:30 p.m., NBC, TV-14).

Kenny's pal Larry has a big announcement on "The War at Home" (8:30 p.m., Fox, TV-14).

On two episodes of "Grey's Anatomy" (ABC, TV-14), vehicular chaos (9 p.m.), teamwork (10 p.m.).

Cult choice

A divorced woman (Uma Thurman) falls for a younger man (Bryan Greenberg) who turns out to be the son of her therapist (Meryl Streep) in the 2005 comedy "Prime" (8:15 p.m., Cinemax).

Series notes

Family feuds on "Til' Death" (8 p.m., Fox, TV-PG, D. L.) ... On two episodes of "Smallville" (CW, TV-PG, D. L. V), Green Arrow (8 p.m.), Aqua Man (9 p.m.) ... Mysterious patients on "Scrubs" (9 p.m., NBC, TV-14) ... Kaitlin collaborates with Will on "The O.C." (9 p.m., Fox, TV-14) ... Liz hears her biological clock tick on "30 Rock" (9:30 p.m., NBC, TV-14).

Late night

Cedric the Entertainer and Switchfoot appear on "Late Show With David Letterman" (11:35 p.m., CBS) ... Jay Leno hosts Hilary Swank and Akon on "The Tonight Show" (11:35 p.m., NBC) ... Maggie Gyllenhaal, Tom O'Dell and Lindsey Buckingham appear on "Jimmy Kimmel Live" (12:05 a.m., ABC).

Louis C.K. appears on "Late Night With Conan O'Brien" (12:35 a.m., NBC) ... Craig Ferguson hosts Carl Reiner, Tracee Ellis Ross and Max Brooks on "The Late, Late Show" (12:37 a.m., CBS).

Kevin McDonough is a TV columnist for United Features Syndicate.

ACCENT ON PEOPLE

The Associated Press

Judge sets deadline in Smith baby dispute

A judge in the Anna Nicole Smith baby dispute has given the former Playboy Playmate until Jan. 23 to have her daughter undergo paternity testing sought by a former boyfriend, the man's attorney said.



SMITH

Superior Court Judge Robert Schneider ruled in favor of the 39-year-old Smith's ex-boyfriend Larry Birkhead last month. Birkhead claims he's the father of Dannielynn Hope Marshall Stern, who was born Sept. 7 in the Bahamas.

It wasn't known when Smith's daughter might have the DNA test.

"We can't make it any easier for her," Birkhead's attorney, Debra Opri, said Tuesday. An after-hours phone message left Tuesday for Smith's lawyer, Ronald A. Sale, wasn't immediately returned. He had previously declined to discuss the judge's ruling. Paternity cases typically are confidential.

Birkhead, 34, sued in October to get a paternity test. Smith's longtime personal lawyer, Howard K. Stern, maintains he is the baby's father.

WEST CHESTER, Pa.

Carly Simon to perform with her kids on QVC

Nobody does it better than Carly Simon. That's what QVC officials are hoping when the singer promotes her new CD, "Into White," on Friday. Simon, 61, will perform with her children, Ben and Sally

Taylor — from her marriage to James Taylor — during a 30-minute broadcast on the cable home shopping channel, a subsidiary of Liberty Media Corp.

Lou Rawls Jr. sues fellow music man Marvin Gaye III

The son of music legend Lou Rawls is suing the son of Motown legend Marvin Gaye, claiming he was attacked by four large dogs during a visit to Gaye's Hollywood home in 2005. The complaint by Lou Rawls Jr. against Marvin Gaye III was filed last week in Los Angeles Superior Court. Rawls claims the dogs bit, clawed and physically and mentally injured him, causing him to suffer loss of blood, tearing of flesh, multiple dog bite wounds, fear of disease and other injuries, according to court documents. He is seeking unspecified damages.

"I have no comment at this time," Rawls' attorney, Alexander J. Petale, said Tuesday. A phone number for Gaye couldn't be obtained, and a court spokeswoman said no lawyer had yet been named for him.

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LOS ANGELES

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THURSDAY EVENING

JANUARY 4, 2007

Grid of TV listings for Thursday evening, including channels like WTTV, WRV, WISH, WTHR, WFYI, WNDY, WTIU, WHMB, WCL, WXIN, WIPX, WDTI, and A&E, with show titles and times.

Continuation of TV listings for Thursday evening, including channels like DISN, ENC, HBO, SHOW, MAX, TMC, and STARZ, with show titles and times.

'L Word' profiles lives, loves in L.A. but is shot in Canada

By BRIDGET BYRNE

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WEST HOLLYWOOD, Calif.

A clutch of stylish-looking women are gathered around a sleek SUV that has pulled up to the curb on a trendy avenue.

Just another location shoot in La-La Land; nothing too unusual about that. So why does a woman passer-by suddenly scream with joy and tear across the street to get a closer look?

Because she's just realized the femme bunch is the cast of "The L Word," which usually doesn't film in Los Angeles.

Showtime's series about a diverse group of L.A. lesbians shoots mainly on soundstages and locations in Vancouver. But how many palm trees can one show fake?

So production for the series' fourth season, which debuts Sunday at 10 p.m., moved to Southern California for several days of shooting at places where the characters live, love, work and play.

Series co-creator Ilene Chaiken hesitates to dub Los Angeles a character in the story. There are, after all, at least 12 main female characters whose stories she's got to fit into this season's dozen episodes.

But she acknowledges "the cultural dynamics of L.A. are embedded in our show. The characters do have L.A. values and are affected by L.A. values to some extent, so I think the series has the specificity



AP PHOTO

Daniela Sea, Jennifer Beals, Laurel Holloman, Leisha Hailey and Mia Kirshner, from left, star in the Showtime series "The L Word." The series is based on life in Los Angeles but is filmed in Vancouver.

a unique culture and environment, but it is dominated by universal emotional experiences that everybody can relate to."

Among the series' leading women are Jennifer Beals as Bette Porter, Laurel Holloman as Tina Kennard, Leisha Hailey as Alice Pieszecki and Daniela Sea as Max Sheeney.

Newcomers this season include Cybill Shepherd as Bette's boss,

Phyllis, who comes out later in life after a conventional heterosexual marriage; Marlee Matlin as Jodi, a deaf artist who has a relationship with Bette, and Rose Rollins as Tasha, who has served a tour of duty in Iraq.

Serious issues — such as the military's "don't ask, don't tell" policy, the legality of same-sex marriages and the challenges of transgender transition — under-

score story lines, but "Sex and the City" style wit and laughter also hold sway.

"In the sense that we deal with the issues of the moment, we deal with them because they affect all of our lives," says Chaiken, who doesn't presume that her show will necessarily change people's attitudes but does hope that depicting lesbian stories in all their human variety may shift opinion.

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