Coffee Basics

Light

Aliases: Cinnamon roast, half city, New England

Roaster Watch: After about seven minutes the beans pop and double in size, and light roasting is achieved. American mass-market roasters typically stop here.

Surface: Dry

Flavor: Light-bodied and somewhat sour, grassy, and snappy

Medium

Aliases: Full city, American, regular, breakfast, brown

Roaster Watch: At nine to eleven minutes the beans reach this roast, which U.S. specialty sellers tend to prefer.

Surface: Dry

Flavor: A bit sweeter than light roast; full body balanced by acid snap, aroma, and complexity

Dark

Aliases: High, Viennese, French, Continental

Roaster Watch: After 12 to 13 minutes the beans begin hissing and popping again, and oils rise to the surface. Roasters from the U.S. Northwest generally remove the beans at this point.

Surface: Slightly shiny

Flavor: Somewhat spicy; complexity is traded for rich chocolaty body, aroma is exchanged for sweetness

Adapted from www.nationalgeographic.com