



EL MACHETE, PANAMA

TASTING NOTES

Like rambling through a berry patch, El Machete brings a cornucopia of fresh blackberry, strawberry and currant. A juicy texture gives way to a piquant acidity that floats above the cup. The berry notes meld into a timely finish of almond and sweet spice.

FLAVORFresh berries, currant
ACIDITYCrisp
MOUTHFEEL.....Juicy, clean
FINISHAlmond, sweet spice

COFFEE

LOCATIONSanta Clara
FARMERJuan Pablo Berard
FARMFinca Santa Teresa
VARIETALCatuai, Caturra, Typica
ALTITUDE1400 - 1500 m
HARVESTDecember - February

PULPED NATURAL EL MACHETE, PANAMA

TASTING NOTES:

Stout-like in its mouthfeel – round, full and steady – the pulped natural El Machete furnishes the palate with notes of dark berry and black mission fig atop an anchored acidity. Dark chocolate sustains a lingering finish of unrefined sugar and hints of English toffee.

FLAVORDark berry, molasses
ACIDITYBalanced, anchored
MOUTHFEEL.....Full, round
FINISHLingering, sweet cocoa

GEOFF'S NOTES

Finca Santa Teresa rests on the outskirts of the El Parque Internacional La Amistad International Reserve, which crosses the Panamanian and Costa Rican border. The farm's steep, protruding ridge invites dramatic weather changes with surging drainage from rains off the Pacific and Atlantic oceans.

When planting Finca Santa Teresa, Juan Pablo Berard, the farm's owner, parceled the land by varietal. This practice, combined with an innovative storage system where individual lots are conditioned separately in small wooden silos, allows Juan Pablo to track each micro-lot from the tree to its final packaging for international shipment.

The high priority given to environmental and social sustainability is evident at Finca Santa Teresa. To prevent erosion, each parcel of land is planted with both live barriers and drainage channels. Juan Pablo has also preserved 25 hectares of virgin forest, providing habitat for animals en route to and from the international reserve.

On the social front, Finca Santa Teresa has joined with the NGO, Casa Esperanza, to ensure an education for farm-workers' children. Juan Pablo constructed the schoolhouse, and Casa Esperanza provides two teachers and supplies educational materials and meals.

Last year Juan Pablo installed more than 500 meters of PVC tubing to be used as a gravity-feed cherry-delivery system. This reduces the distance that pickers must carry cherries by half. It also eliminates the need for daily truck runs up and down the farm, thereby reducing the bruising of cherries in transit. Another notable step in the farm's development was the construction of a dry mill, resulting in greater control of the processing of coffee from picking to export.

In keeping with his commitment to innovation, Sr. Berrard has been experimenting with different processing techniques. This year he produced several small lots of pulped natural coffee (known locally as "honey coffees") and we were impressed enough to bring one in and offer it alongside the traditional washed versions.

In the washed process, which is most common in Latin America and Africa and is used for the huge majority of coffees we purchase, ripe cherries are de-pulped (removed from the skin) and fermented in a tank for between 12 and 36 hours before they are washed with clean water and lightly scrubbed to remove residual mucilage. Once cleaned, the coffees are set to dry on patios or elevated screens. Coffees produced this way showcase the intrinsic organic acids that give coffee its sometimes bewildering complexity and tend to come across as bright and refreshing.

In the pulped natural method process (also known as the semi-washed process) that is most common to Brazil, freshly picked cherries are de-

pulped to remove the outer skin and then set immediately to dry, without any intermediate wet fermentation stage. The sticky-sweet inner layer of mucilage (or "honey") which is normally broken down and scrubbed off in traditional wet processing instead clings to the seed throughout the long

drying process and influences the dry fermentation. There is some risk here. Due to the presence of sugars in the mucilage, there is always an increased risk of compromised quality that can result from rotting fruit or the invasion of microorganisms. It is only recommended in areas where there the climate provides consistent sun and low humidity during the critical drying stages.

When it works, this process can yield coffees that emphasize big sweetness and seductive fruit notes that remind one of cherry, raisin, plum, or slightly overripe berry. Semi-washed coffees have a somewhat reduced acidity that allows the other characteristics in the flavor profile to stand out in a way they sometimes don't when the acids are dominant. When it goes wrong, coffees can taste harsh or present a cloying flavor of decomposing fruit.

When I visited the farm this past January, I was skeptical, as I am not usually too keen on pulped-natural coffees and would rarely recommend the technique to farmers because it introduces an increased level of risk to an already difficult job. If the coffee spoils, a farmer can lose out big-time, having dramatically decreased the potential value of the crop. But in the hands of a very careful, practiced farmer it can indeed produce delicious coffees that are profoundly different in cup character than their washed cousins. Juan Pablo did everything right—the coffee was dried on raised beds (not on patios) under a translucent cover, ensuring that they would be aerated and shielded from any rain. The coffee was turned religiously to allow for even drying, and there was even a mechanical dryer on hand to finish the job, if necessary.

Still, I was certain we would prefer the washed coffee to the "honey" version, but when we received and blind-cupped the samples in February, we found all of our biases challenged...the top cupping coffee turned out to be the pulped natural! Just another reminder that being dogmatic about one's opinion in the world of coffee is a foolish stance to take! There is still so much we do not understand about the mysterious chemistry of coffee flavor, and we must be grateful for the existence of farmers like Juan Pablo who are willing to take risk in order to discover new possibilities.

Several months later, the coffee now in Chicago, I do find that I prefer the washed lot ever-so-slightly over the honey version, but it is close. And for espresso preparation it may be that the honey coffee has an advantage. Either way, these are two fantastic specimens worth checking out, and I highly recommend taking the time to taste both side by side in order to better understand the impact that processing method can have on the character of a coffee!

GEOFF WATTS IS INTELLIGENTSIA'S COFFEE BUYER.