



INTELLIGENTSIA COFFEE PRESENTS

★ DIRECT TRADE COSTA RICA ★

# FLECHA ROJA

## COFFEE

**LOCATION** .....Tarrazu  
**VARIETAL** ..... Caturra, Catuai  
**ALTITUDE** ..... 1400 - 1800 m  
**HARVEST** ..... November - February

## CHARACTERISTICS

**FLAVOR** .....Black cherry, red grape  
**ACIDITY** ..... Balanced, tangy  
**FINISH** ..... Crisp, punctuated, molasses



## TASTING NOTES

If this year's Flecha Roja could hold a conversation, it would be both inviting and direct. Flavors of ripe grapes and cherries are punctuated with a light citrus acidity. The finish is smooth and crisp with hints of molasses. As the cup cools, the wealth of flavor is fully realized, making each sip an important new phrase in this graceful monologue.

## GEOFF'S NOTES

Flecha Roja is a study in coffee excellence. That's an amazing thing to say, right? But it is not hyperbole. When I stand back and consider all of the coffees we work with (all of the countries, all of the different farms and farmers), it occurs to me that I could write a fairly detailed and accurate prescription for improvement for each of them. I can identify relative strengths and weaknesses pretty well at this point. Whether it be organizational efficiency and effectiveness, infrastructure improvements, advancement in farming technique, better process control, more transparency, better environmental protections... all of the Direct Trade projects we work on have a lot of room to evolve and get better...except for Flecha Roja.

Sure, there are always some things that can improve and nothing is perfect. Improving soil quality and decreasing dependence on fertilizers is one thing that comes to mind, and moving towards greater diversity in coffee varieties might be a nice goal for the future. But I'm picking nits now, and in any case, these are things that apply across the board in nearly every coffee farming region or group.

So let's just look at the facts:

1. Coope Dota is one of the most well-run, long-standing, successful cooperatives I've ever seen. It should stand as a model for others. That's a tribute to good leadership as much as anything else. They've got an admirably transparent and clear system for delivering payment and profit to coop members. They run the mill in St. Maria with great precision—it is clean, efficient, and modern. They've got excellent control over the fermentation and drying processes. They are invested in coffee culture. They run a roasting operation and a coffeeshop on premises and actively celebrate the culture of quality. They've sustained and thrived through decades of crazy market conditions, peaks and valleys, and have managed to grow and improve where so many

other groups have splintered or failed. One of the key reasons for this is that they've never lacked for vision or been unwilling to take action. They were early backers of the Specialty movement and are still operating near the vanguard.

2. As a country, Costa Rica is home to is one of the most openly competitive and transparent coffee industries on the planet. Not everything is perfect, but if you were a coffee grower over the last thirty years, I do believe you would have been best off living in the land of the Tica.
3. The Costa Rican coffee industry is among the best regulated in the world. Environmental controls, enforcement of labor laws, and farmers' ability to access critical information about exports and market changes are all tops.
4. Costa Rica has been at the center of research and development in coffee technology. CATIE is a world-renowned agricultural institute with a focus on coffee.

So let's step back again and look at this: Coope Dota is a top contender for title of "most revered and most successful cooperative" in Costa Rica. Costa Rica is the industry leader when it comes to across-the-board sustainability in coffee. They've got some of the best quintal/hectare yields in the coffee world with highly productive small family farms. They've got impressive environmental controls. And they've got the most transparent local coffee industry I've seen anywhere in the world. Farmers have no shortage of options—there are a lot of places where they can sell their coffees—so establishing loyalty and continuity should be that much more difficult. But Coope Dota has certainly accomplished that. So to be a standout in a country that already stands way out...that is meaningful.

We've worked with Coope Dota for a long time. In the early days of Intelligentsia some of our Costa Rican coffee came from them, albeit indirectly. What was

missing back then was any kind of focus on micro, on specificity, on detail. They sold a lot of coffee to Starbucks and had evolved systems for doing a great job with caring for coffees on a large-volume level, but a lot of detail was getting lost! Individual lots of coffee from small farms were getting routinely mixed together before anyone had a chance to evaluate the sensory quality. Lots of treasures were getting lost in the shuffle, contributing to an overall goodness in the coffees coming from Dota but leaving them a bit short of true greatness. Those coffees were clean and tasty and reliable and consistent but perhaps a bit boring as compared to coffees we were finding from other Central American countries.

That shortcoming has been remedied now. We started working with Coope Dota again about four years ago and helped them put together a micro-mill and a Micro-Lot program that would segregate the best coffees from the rest so that they could capture higher value in the increasingly differentiated Specialty market. Doing so would bring immediate rewards in the form of higher premiums for the coffee, but the long-term impact is perhaps more important as this program has brought a new understanding of quality to the membership. The idea that quality has a scale, that there are many levels of quality, and not just good coffee and poor coffee, has really begun to sink in, and this is among the most important realizations a coffee grower can have. It is the first step in a transition from coffee cultivator and harvester to coffee craftsman and artisan.

I'm really proud of Coope Dota. And I'm excited to be working with them. These really are the best Costa Rican coffees I've ever had, and they can stand toe-to-toe with the best from other countries without flinching. The Red Arrow flies straight and true.

**Geoff Watts** is Intelligentsia's Vice President & Green Coffee Buyer.