

★ GATURIRI AUCTION LOT ★
KENYA



COFFEE

LOCATIONNyeri District
VARIETALSL-28, SL-34
ALTITUDE1850 - 2100 m
HARVESTNovember - January

CHARACTERISTICS

FLAVORRed wine, fruit nectar
ACIDITYRefined, citric
FINISHClove, molasses

TASTING NOTES

There's nothing like it. Kenyan coffee's uniquely flavorful profile is not merely upheld, but expounded upon in this year's crop, and it remains one of the most inspiring and recognizable of our offerings. Surfacing above the hearty wine-like body and grapefruit-inspired acidity are hints of peach, guava, apricot, mango, and a myriad of other ripe fruit nectars that resolve gracefully into a warm and clean finish of clove, cinnamon and sweet molasses. Its broad-ranging appeal is certain to excite the taste buds of both the adventuresome and casual sipper.

GEOFF'S NOTES

Kenyan coffee deserves its own category in the coffee world. There is good reason why many of the most experienced coffee fanatics in the industry call Kenya their favorite: It's a unique and flat-out spectacular coffee! Why is it so great? A near-perfect synergy of altitude, latitude, botany and processing tradition is the most logical answer.

The country's location smack on the equator and the exceptional altitudes (up to 2100 meters in some regions) give Kenyan farmers an advantageous climate for producing top coffees. The SL-28 and SL-34 cultivars that have been planted there are known to produce coffees with compelling aromatic and acidic qualities. And when it comes to preserving or enhancing cup quality, the Kenyan traditions for post-harvest coffee handling seem to be among the most effective among growing countries. The Kenyan method allows for fermentation times that can reach up to 72 hours – triple that of many other growing regions. This combination of wet and dry fermentation followed by a post-washing 24-hour soaking period may indeed contribute to the astounding depth and intensity of flavor in these beans. There is some speculation about the participation of amino acids that develop during the soaking period having some effect on flavor. We've been running some experiments in Rwanda to replicate the processes and try to better understand the impact of the fermentation.

Once fermentation is completed and the coffees are washed and bathed, they are transferred to drying tables. Kenyans have long used elevated screens to dry the

parchment, in contrast to the cement patios that are the norm in Central America. (Raised drying platforms are often called "Kenyan" beds by producers using them in other countries.) Coffee dried on screens has several advantages: better air circulation, more even drying, no contact with hot surfaces, and more protection from re-wetting in the case of rain. They also allow for better sorting of the parchment during the drying as the tables sit at waist-height making it easy for coop workers to spread the coffees around and pick through them without needing to bend over.

A mandatory auction system that rewards quality with dollars also makes some of the best Kenyan coffees available for purchase as single lots. The best of the lots often sell for prices three to four times higher than the best coffees in other countries. This system, while helpful in some ways, is also highly problematic. Despite a commendable level of transparency that is embedded in the auction system, there are opportunities for corruption that occur due to the lack of options offered to the farmer. Nearly 60% of Kenyan coffee (and most of the best) comes from smallholder producers who sell through local cooperatives. Oftentimes the great premiums awarded in the auctions do not end up in the farmer's pocket, and many Kenyan farmers are barely sustaining themselves with coffee production.

This is the great tragedy of Kenyan coffee: it is widely acknowledged as one of the top coffees in the world and consistently purchased by roasters at very high prices, yet

the individual farmers are rarely compensated properly. Last year the long talked about "second window" officially opened up, allowing for more licensed agents and paving the way for more direct relationships between growers and roasters. There are still some details to be settled, and there is fierce debate within the local industry as to whether or not the new system will work. The next several years will be critical in helping Kenyan farmers achieve their goals of increased production and premiums.

This season marks a significant step forward in our sourcing efforts in Kenya. We've begun working directly with several cooperatives in the Nyeri district, and for the first time in our history have bought some coffees straight from the cooperatives, without sending the coffee through auction. I'm headed back there in October to meet with the growers en masse and map out some plans for further quality separations and long-term commitments. It's an exciting time, and I am especially intrigued over the idea that these coffees may possibly get even better in the cup. Seems hard to imagine, given that they already sing like the most irresistible of sirens, but there is reason to believe that improved farm husbandry and more direct participation in the quality processes by the farmers themselves will push the quality to even further heights.

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