

★ DIRECT TRADE NICARAGUA ★
FINCA SAN JOSÉ

COFFEE

LOCATION Jinotega
VARIETAL Catuai
ALTITUDE 1275 - 1375 m
HARVEST February 9-10, 2008

CHARACTERISTICS

FLAVOR Baker's chocolate, dried berry
ACIDITY Balanced, citrus zest
FINISH Lingering, spice, licorice

STEVE MIERISCH'S NOTES

Greetings. By way of a quick introduction, my name is Steve Mierisch, I am the Northeast Sales Representative for Intelligentsia Coffee, and my family has coffee farms in Nicaragua. When I give people this last bit of information, I usually get the question, "Does Intelligentsia buy from your family's farm?" Now I am able to answer her.

I met Geoff Watts and Doug Zell while volunteering at the first Cup of Excellence in Nicaragua in 2002. We became friends, and I have submitted green coffee samples to them for consideration and feedback every year since then. The process was definitely bittersweet. Someone telling you that you are good, but not great, is both humbling and motivating.

As Geoff has mentioned many times, coffee farming does not provide instant gratification. It takes coffee four years to come to full production, and it takes a full year to see results from changes that one makes to the farm or processes. My family has been making constant improvements to farm infrastructure and wet and dry milling processes, and we have tried different and new cultivars. Every year we get a better coffee, which has recently resulted in some great recognition of our efforts. One of our farms took 27th Place in the 2007 Cup of Excellence, and this year one of our coffees received 2nd Place. (Intelligentsia will also be featuring this coffee in a few weeks, so be sure to look for it.)

One reason that we have been able to make such dramatic improvements to our coffee is



TASTING NOTES

Finca San José begins as smooth baker's chocolate and dried berry. The body is firm but not overbearing as hints of orange spice and cardamom emerge in the center. Notably, the coffee blooms in the finish, letting baking spice and licorice notes effloresce to add complexity and length to the taste experience.

that from farm to mill, we keep our coffee lots separate throughout the entire process. Our coffee is tagged with information (date and location of harvest, date of wet milling, and date of arrival at the dry mill) that allows us to trace the coffee and determine which plots of land are excelling and where we might have problems. If there is a tainted batch of coffee, we can see who was wet milling that day or pinpoint how many days it spent where. This is a very important tool to make appropriate changes and tweaks to the process.

After our coffee is harvested, the Intelligentsia Quality Control Team then cups the samples from different parts of the farm, and they ultimately construct a coffee from the lots that they determine to be the cream of the crop. This is the same model that is used to create all Intelligentsia Direct Trade Coffees. While some coffees (like Tres Santos, Colombia and Flor Azul, Nicaragua) are selected from individual lots submitted by many farmers in a cooperative, Finca San Jose is selected from multiple lots submitted by a single farm. The farm is divided into plantíos (lots which are named). This coffee comes from Plantio La Lima which is at an elevation of 1275-1375 meters. It was harvested over two days on February 9-10, 2008, after which it was processed using the washing method at the wet mill. It arrived at the dry mill on February 11th, where it began its process of sun bathing and resting. The coffee was then milled on May 13th and it arrived at the Roasting Works on June 18th.

When my father bought Finca San Jose in

2003, I thought he was crazy as we were still recovering from the coffee crisis, a period when market prices were less than the cost of production. Upon my first visit to the farm, I knew why he had done it. Since the farm was overgrown with weeds, there was no sign of coffee tree life, but it was beautiful and the view was spectacular. After many machete hours, we saw what was there: very sad coffee trees. A month later, which is an extremely short period in a coffee tree's lifetime, the plants were already healthy and beautiful. We instantly knew we had something special.

I believe there will always be room for improvement and learning. We are all still in the infancy of Specialty Coffee production, and the industry as a whole has not yet reached its full potential. The wings in the Intelligentsia logo represent the goal of elevating the coffee experience. I particularly like this theme because this pursuit is shared equally by farmers, roasters, cafes and consumers. This attitude is spreading, and it's great to be a part of it.

The fact that Intelligentsia is offering my family's coffee is a very exciting accomplishment, and I, as a representative for Intelligentsia, am especially happy. We, both Intelligentsia and my family, hope you enjoy the coffee.

Steve Mierisch lives and works in NYC.