Rwanda is known as “the land of a thousand hills” for the countless rolling slopes and gentle, rounded peaks that stretch in every direction throughout the country. This tiny country is home to over half a million smallholder coffee farmers whose farms are nano-scale, measured by the number of coffee plants rather than the size of the landholding. On average, the coffee gardens on these farms contain just 100-200 coffee plants. And since each one produces fewer than ten pounds of cherry over the three-month harvest period, a typical daily picking may only fill a couple of buckets. Nearly all of the coffee here is produced this way: in tiny quantities, hand-picked by growers who transport their cherry on foot or on bike to communal washing stations where it is combined and processed together with other coffees that arrived at the same time. A single ‘day lot’ from the Nyarusiza washing station can contain coffees from several hundred individual producers. Weeks later, when these day lots are moved to the dry mill for final preparation, they are usually put together into even larger batches. That means the coffee that is exported from Rwanda often represents the combined work of up to a thousand growers or more.

That’s why it is extremely unusual to see a single farmer’s name attached to a bag of Rwandan coffee. But Gaspard has broken the mold, and done so with a loud crack. In 1997, he started his farm with 100 plants and few expectations for success given how little coffee was valued back then. Fortunately, despite limited early returns on his investment in coffee, he persisted. In 2003, Gaspard’s fortunes began to change when he connected with Sam Muhirwa from Bufcafe. He began applying better farm management practices—mulching, pruning, and increased attention to soil quality. He achieved better yields. And he began seeing some returns on all that he had invested into the farm. By 2015, he’d expanded the farm to nearly 20,000 coffee plants and begun intercropping coffee with macadamia trees to diversify his income.

Gaspard’s commitment and visible advances in recent years have proven contagious: others in the community want to catch the same bug he did, and Gaspard is happy to oblige. He’s been working with many of his neighbors, sharing his accumulated wisdom about coffee farming to help them follow in his footsteps. Today, he aggregates coffees from some of his friends with adjacent farms and delivers them together with his own to the mill at Nyarusiza, where they are pulped and processed separately from all the others. This is the third year we’ve been selling his coffees under his name, and we are honored to be part of his story.