

ARNAUD CAUSSE - JAVA

RESERVE LOT OFFERING



COUNTRY	ECUADOR
REGION	PICHINCHA
VARIETAL	JAVA
FARM	LAS TOLAS
PROCESSING	WASHED
ELEVATION	1,800 - 2,100 MASL

Ecuadorian coffee is a study in value. It forces us, as coffee roasters, as well as consumers, to think about the price we are paying for coffee, think about the quality of the coffee, think about the factors that go into the final cost of a coffee, and finally, to make a decision on whether or not we think the price tag associated with the coffee is appropriate. Ecuadorian coffees challenge us to assess the value of coffee beyond the flavor characteristics of the coffee. And this is very important, because if specialty coffee is ever to achieve its fairly lofty goal it often claims of providing a modicum of social development and financial progress in some of the world's poorest communities, then Ecuadorian coffee represents a potential model. At the very least it provides a signpost for economic progress in producing countries.

Ecuadorian coffee is expensive. This is to some degree simple economics: supply and demand. Ecuador produces about 7000,000 bags of coffee a year. Compare that to its neighbor, Colombia, which is producing nearly 13,000,000 bags a year and the supply factor comes into focus. Further, Ecuador is one of the largest exporters of soluble (instant) coffee, currently in 4th position, after Colombia. In 2014 the Arabica exports of Ecuadorian coffee were down to 30 containers (a container contains roughly 40,000 pounds of coffee). To put that into context, Ethiopia exports roughly 20,500 containers of Arabica coffee a year. Colombia exports roughly 27,000 containers.

But the economics go beyond simple supply and demand. The cost of production is quite high in Ecuador and this is related to a number of factors. The factor we will focus on for the purpose of this information sheet is the cost of labor. For most farmers 40-60% of their cost of production is labor. In recent years the minimum wage in Ecuador has roughly doubled. In 2007 the minimum wage was \$170/month, in 2015 that was up to \$354/month. In addition to a wage increase there has been the addition of benefits such as vacation, contributions to healthcare, and contribution to social security - all mandated by law. In total the cost of a full-time farm employee in Ecuador is roughly \$22/day. Compare that to Colombia where wages can be as low as \$4/day and, well, there is no comparison.

Quoting Julia Fariss of Red Fox Coffee Merchants, who sourced and imported our Ecuadorian lots this year:

If we're serious about wanting to build a resilient supply chain that benefits everyone in it, how can we write off Ecuadorian coffee as too expensive when those high prices reflect a labor market in which farm workers are receiving more? Part of why we do what we do is because of our belief that there is a model out there in which coffee production can support and sustain individuals, families, communities, and perhaps even economies as a whole. If Ecuador is a test case, then we're up to the challenge.

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We, at Passenger, could not agree more with Julia. If the cost of these coffees is high because the farmers and the workers they employ are receiving a truly livable wage (and not simply a wage on which one can continue to subsist, biologically speaking), then we are thrilled to bring these beautiful coffees to market. Which touches on another crucial reason Passenger thinks it is important to present Ecuadorian coffees... these are stunning coffees.

Passenger purchased two lots from Arnaud Causse whose farm, Las Tolas, is located in Pichincha. A study in both contrast as well as subtlety, we secured two varieties grown on the same farm: a Bourbon lot and a Java lot. A study in contrast because tasting the lots side by side allows one to see the difference brought forth by plant genetics. There are two primary genetic lines in coffee varieties. Typica is a general name used for numerous types of tall Arabica varieties. Its predecessors were originally brought to Java from Yemen in the early 1700s. Bourbon is a group of Arabica plants that developed naturally on the Island of Bourbon, today known as Reunion, east of Madagascar. The Java lot from Las Tolas represents the Typica heritage with the other lot representing the Bourbon line.

These lots are a study in subtlety, on the other hand, due to their remarkably delicate nature. Some of the finest Ecuadorian coffees, such as these lots, are, in our opinion, not obtuse coffees. Rather, they express their beauty in refinement and constraint. For this reason these coffees are easily overshadowed in mixed tastings with heavy hitters like East African coffees also present. But focus on their flavors on their own and they are delicacy itself. The Bourbon lot has a profound depth of sweetness wrapped around a core of delicate red apple acidity with a sweet almond characteristic reminiscent of marzipan, whereas the Java lot has a milk chocolate base surrounding a stone fruit backbone with a distinct and delicate wafer cookie finish.

IN THE CUP

A milk chocolate base grounds a coffee marked by subtle fresh apricot acidity with caramel sweetness and a wafer cookie finish. This coffee is elegance, defined.

THE TAKEAWAY

A number of factors ranging from supply and demand to cost of labor in Ecuador align to make coffees from this South American country quite expensive. Not only do we at Passenger think that Ecuador is still an important country to present from the perspective of flavor and terroir, but we also think it is important to present coffees that start to approach a truly sustainable supply chain. One where every participant in the chain is paid a truly, rather than nominally, livable wage.

