

# GESHA VILLAGE

## 2018 RELEASE RESERVE LOT

<b>COUNTRY</b>	ETHIOPIA
<b>NEAREST TOWN</b>	GESHA
<b>ELEVATION</b>	1,900-2,100 MASL
<b>VARIETIES</b>	HEIRLOOM GESHA
<b>PROCESSING</b>	DRY PROCESSED
<b>HARVEST SEASON</b>	NOVEMBER-JANUARY
<b>HARVEST YEAR</b>	2016-2017



The Gesha Village journey began back in 2007 when Adam Overton and Rachel Samuel were making a documentary about coffee for the Ethiopian government. It was during this project that they were first introduced to Dr. Girma, their guide through the Gera Coffee Forest near Jimma. Dr. Girma is a coffee researcher and is a wealth of information about coffee agronomy, and farm management. During the process of creating this documentary, Rachel was reintroduced to her birth country and Adam became fascinated by the rich coffee history of the birthplace of coffee.

By the end of this coffee expedition, the couple felt compelled to start their own coffee farm. They saw too much unexplored potential and opportunity in Ethiopia's wild coffee forests to ignore. Even though the country's coffee trade was established long ago, Ethiopia's coffee sector as a whole was and indeed still is far behind newer coffee origins in terms of agricultural and processing innovations, as well as market access, which -in the current state of the coffee industry- are some of the most important distinctions between specialty and commercial coffee. Adam and Rachel sought to utilize this gap in the Ethiopian specialty market to establish Gesha Village Estate.

From 2007-2010, the couple scoured the country in search for the perfect place to set up their project. One of the initial criteria was that the farm should be within close proximity to the capital city, Addis Ababa, due to practical transport considerations. More importantly, however, were other considerations:

- Altitude: between 1,800-2,100 meters above sea level,
- A relatively large piece of land (over 100 hectares),
- Old growth/primary forest,
- Established shade trees,
- Road access,
- Access to labor,
- No displacement of inhabitants

As they surveyed place after place, they drew further and further away from Addis. Finally, they found Gesha town, very close to Ethiopia's border with South Sudan, in the far western region of the country. During their reconnaissance, they found wild coffee growing within pristine forest. This coffee paradise, combined with meeting some inhabitants from the Meanit community who are indigenous to the area, also drew the couple in. This was a place and people where something completely cutting-edge could happen.

In autumn of 2011 the lease for the 471 hectares that now make up Gesha Village Estate was signed and soon after, Akalu, Gesha Village's (henceforth GV) Farm Manager was hired. He, together with the newly established GV team, began doing a forest exploration where they picked wild seeds from the nearby Gori Gesha forest. After a year in the nursery, these seeds were planted on 30 hectares and at the same time, the team began

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acquainting themselves with the Meanit neighbours that lived around them. This initial 30 hectares made up GV's first "test plot" – the team wanted to ensure the cup quality was good before more coffee was planted. The first kilogram sample was sent to Adam and Rachel's friend Willem Boot in the spring of 2012, even before they themselves had a chance to cup the coffee. Willem in turn organized a cupping event in Ethiopia where cuppers were blown away by the coffee. At this point, the GV team knew that they were onto something special.

Before getting too ahead of themselves, the team decided to visit their neighbors' coffee farms in order to both study the morphology of more established trees, which also came from forest seeds, and also to cup their neighbors' coffees to further understand what they were working with at GV. As exciting as cultivating forest coffee was, the team understood that planting one of any variety was risky and on the advice of Akalu and Dr. Girma, decided to plant a good portion of GV with tried and tested Ethiopian heirloom varieties released from the Jimma Agricultural Research Center (JARC). These released varieties come from various seed collection expeditions that the JARC has conducted. Wild varieties collected during expeditions are studied and researchers are looking for the following characteristics in determining which are "superior plants": a) showing disease resistance; b) excellent cup quality; and c) good yield. Plants showing these characteristics are chosen for release and GV chose to plant a variety that originated in the highland coffee forests of Illubabor. This one showed both disease resistance and excellent cup quality.

## **The Community**

Before the project started in earnest, the GV team gathered the elders and wise men from the local Meanit community in order to explain the project as well as hear out the community's thoughts and concerns about it. Though successful as an introduction, the team understood from the beginning that a real partnership would take time and effort and one of the early challenges GV faced was finding laborers. There was a stigma against working for someone else as most people already had their own garden farms.

Over time, women began working with the farm and since they earned their own income for the first time, this early labour force attracted more and more people, eventually both women and men. Today, GV can attract up to 800 workers per day. These workers come from 5-6 different kebeles (localities) spanning from Gesha Mountain to Gori Gesha Forest.

Now that a good relationship has been established between Gesha Village Estate and their surrounding communities, three local representatives have been appointed to liaise between the farm and its neighboring communities.

## **Social Projects**

Nearby to Gesha Village are three government run schools and one clinic. These are all within a short walking distance from the estate and this is significant as in rural Ethiopia, many students must walk up to three hours in order to get to school. Gesha Village provides school supplies to students and is currently working with the clinic in order to figure out the best way to support its operation. One other community project that the GV team is focusing its efforts on is distributing fuel efficient and cleaner burning stoves to their neighbors. Most households currently use outdated stoves that require lots of wood/fuel and burn a lot of waste particles into the atmosphere. For the past three years GV has given away 25,000 coffee seedlings per year to neighboring farmers. The team also provides agronomy training when the farmers pick up their seedlings. GV hopes to grow coffee production in the surrounding area so that local farmers can benefit from the innovations employed at GV.

## **Agricultural Projects**

On the botanical side of things, the GV team planted a research plot in early 2016 that is made up of various

indigenous coffee varieties. This will allow the team, including Dr. Girma, to better study varieties. The team is keen to continue working with public and educational partners to carry out future research that will add to the knowledge they've already accumulated.

In addition to coffee, GV is currently testing apple and honey cultivation. The motivation behind these two projects is mostly one of curiosity, but who knows where things will lead?

#### **IN THE CUP**

Striking in its clarity of flavor, this Dry Processed lot is dominated by tropical fruit flavors. Incredibly clean, the primary flavors found in this lot are from the variety and the place it was grown, not the processing method. That said, there is a distinct fruited character related to the Dry Process method. This is naturally processed coffee at its finest.

#### **THE TAKEAWAY**

Gesha Village is a truly one-of-a-kind project in the Southwestern highlands of Ethiopia. The 2015-2016 Harvest year was their first ever harvest (they had a small crop the previous year, but it was very tiny due to the young plants). This lot is from the 2016-2017 harvest, their second harvest ever. This coffee has been held in deep freeze storage since it arrived in the States last year and tastes as fresh as it did the day it arrived. We feel honored to have been able to secure lots from both their first and second ever harvests and look forward to continuing our relationship with this impressive farm and people.

