

RUSTY'S TYPICA

EDUCATION LOT

COUNTRY	USA
REGION	KA'U, HAWAII
VARIETAL	TYPICA
PROCESSING	WASHED
ELEVATION	500 MASL



Coffee arrived in Hawaii in 1817, but was not successfully cultivated at that time. Only a few years later, in 1825, some plants were brought to the islands by way of Brazil by the governor of Oahu who stopped in South America on a journey back from Europe. These plants did thrive and coffee production quickly spread throughout the state. The labor demand attracted many Chinese and then Japanese to the islands. In the 1920's there was a large influx of Filipinos who would alternate between working on coffee plantations and sugarcane plantations based on the season. It was not until the 1980's, however, that coffee became a strong economic force in Hawaii. The sugarcane industry had become unprofitable at that time, finding itself unable to compete with third world countries. It was around this time that coffee was beginning to enjoy the status of a slightly more elevated culinary experience, with roasters like Peet's and Starbucks gaining traction and garnering attention. Couple this slightly elevated status with an already popular tourism destination and excellent market access (market access that farmers from no other coffee producing region enjoy, even today in a much more globalized world than the 1980's) and you set the stage for what has evolved into the Hawaiian coffee industry.

Excellent market access, savvy farm owners, low supply and high costs of production all add to the incredibly high prices paid for Hawaiian coffees. Beyond that, the flavors associated with a clean, well grown and well processed Hawaiian coffee aren't the same flavors that many specialty coffee professionals covet. The acidity is almost always deeply integrated and on the low end of the spectrum, the coffees are rarely complex and the flavors are generally reminiscent of low grown, mild Latin American coffees - which are some of the cheapest coffees one can buy. Beyond all of this, it is only a very small percentage of Hawaiian coffees that are expertly crafted. As Tom Owens of Sweet Maria's puts it, "the best [Hawaiian] coffees cost a lot and the worst cost way too much."

However, when the coffees are well grown, well processed and well roasted, they can present a deeply gratifying coffee experience. An experience made all the more enjoyable by the ever so tiny twinge of patriotism one can experience sitting in a coffee shop in the States sipping on a coffee that was grown, roasted and brewed in the USA.

This lot was grown in the Ka'u region of Hawaii which is located in the south of the Big Island. Coffee production is relatively new to Ka'u, starting after the closing of the region's sugar mill in 1996. This lot was produced by Lorie Obra, who's husband, Rusty, planted their farm in Ka'u in 1999. Rusty passed in 2006, but Lorie, along with her children, have kept the farm running and are working extremely hard to produce the finest Hawaiian coffee available. We purchased a 100% typica variety lot for its enjoyable cup character and also for the ability to present a teachable moment.

Why this coffee is being presented as an Education Lot:

This coffee was chosen to be presented as an Education Lot because of the spotlight it shines on the economic realities of coffee. Whenever someone from our green buying teams asks a coffee farmer what their greatest expense is we are almost always met with the same answer: labor. People are expensive, and specialty coffee production requires lots of hands. Coffee must be hand picked, hand processed. Even a small coffee farm requires many laborers. Put in the context of Hawaii, where minimum wage is currently \$9.25 an hour, and even laborers getting paid the State's minimum pay rate will make for an expensive coffee.

We recently released some beautiful coffees from a producer named Arnaud Causse in Ecuador and this very topic was discussed surrounding his coffees. Ecuador is considered to have a very high cost of production in the coffee producing world, with the minimum wage at roughly \$2.75 an hour! Comparing Hawaii's \$9.25 an hour to \$2.75, or go a step further and compare it to Colombia's roughly 50¢ an hour (and this isn't even to dive into countries such as Ethiopia or Burundi where day laborers make still less) and it is quite easy to see how you arrive at high prices. Is this to say that all coffees from Hawaii are worth extremely high prices? Yes and no. "Yes" in that all coffee, generally speaking, the world over, should cost more than they currently do if this is to be a thriving and legitimate industry, rather than a neo-colonial industry that keeps non-whites oppressed while offering price incentives just enough to keep them productive. But, "no" in the sense that it is our belief at Passenger that quality should be rewarded by price. Which brings us to the final point surrounding this coffee.

This is a truly delicious coffee. This estate produces one of, if not the single, finest examples of what a Hawaiian coffee is capable of being. That is to say, this is the pinnacle of Hawaiian terroir. What is that worth? Is it worth a higher price, even if you could buy a much cheaper, arguably "better" coffee from Kenya (or anywhere else, Kenya is simply given here as an example)? We at Passenger do believe that it is worth a higher price. From the consumer side, specialty coffee is a celebration of refinement. It is going beyond using coffee as a vehicle for caffeine and exploring the flavors of a certain time and place crafted by people in the producing countries (farmers) and the consuming country (roasters and baristas). It approximates art. It goes beyond function and enters that which makes us truly human. So yes, at Passenger we believe that presenting the finest example of Hawaiian terroir and potential is indeed worth a high price tag.

IN THE CUP

Ceylon tea and raisin dominate the aroma of this cup which provides clean, articulate flavors of cocoa and black tea (which we find fairly unique as we usually identify the bittering base qualities of a coffee as being either more chocolate-like in character or more black tea-like in character, but rarely both) and also dried fruit (raisin and dried apricot). The sweetness is clean and reminiscent of simple syrup with a very clean wet clay/earth-like quality, not too dissimilar from the better cups of Rwandan coffees we have enjoyed in the past, emerging as the cup cools.

THE TAKEAWAY

Value is a challenging topic in specialty coffee. How much should coffee cost? What elements should or should not influence the final price of a coffee? We purchased this incredible representation of Hawaiian terroir from Laurie Obra not only because we found the cup deeply satisfying, but also because we are excited to present it in a way that challenges our customers to think about what a cup of coffee would cost if every single person in the supply chain was paid a truly livable wage. This coffee is part of our Education Lot series. Read more about our Education Lots on our blog.

