

**FARM** Finca Las Brisas    **REGION** Juayúa, Apaneca-Illamatepec

**VARIETY** Castillo (Caturra/Timor Hybrid)    **PROCESS** Dehydrated Honey

**SUMMARY** Bright and clean citric acidity, wonderful sweetness, full body



Pola's Castillo variety is one that we are quite excited about this year. We bought the entire lot (912lbs) after cupping it in January, because it stood out on every blind table. This offering comes from an experimental section of Finca Las Brisas where Carlos has planted many different varieties for research and development. Castillo is known to be resistant to leaf rust, and when cultivated with as much care as Pola's, can taste absolutely delightful. The dehydrated honey process involves an extra 2-3 days of aerobic fermentation (in permeable sacks) before depulping and drying.

## **REGENERATIVE PRACTICES**

Every single year when we visit with Carlos, he's onto something new. His energy for improvement and constant innovation is incredible. Early on he shared with us his focus on mycelial networks and how they share nutrients under the soil. He is completely aware of these vital nutrient networks and works tirelessly towards nourishing them. Now a lot more research on the subject has come to our attention, but few coffee farmers seem to have awareness around mycelial networks and mycorrhizal activity like Carlos does. He selects and plants new shade trees that not only provide cover from direct sun but also introduce specific nutrients into the soil which are then shared by mycorrhizae with the roots of the coffee trees. These nutrient exchanges diminish the need for chemical fertilizers which not only reduce the cost of growing, but encourage long-term soil health. Pola has witnessed nearby farms suffer the consequences of an over-reliance on chemical fertilizers and pesticides. The more one uses these inputs (which are being promoted by agronomists), the more they are relied upon year after year creating a very unsustainable dynamic with the ecosystem.

Sometimes it feels like Carlos focuses more on soil health and shade trees than the coffee trees themselves, but the amazing thing is that it pays off in coffee quality as well. He is digging deeper and approaching his farming comprehensively. The flavor of the coffee is a direct result of the health of the entire system, and he is doing everything he can to create a regenerative ecosystem. These are some of the reasons that we admire Carlos and his approach to coffee. He is also quite adamant about sharing his process with other coffee producers for the betterment of El Salvador and coffee as a whole.

## **AN EXAMPLE OF POLA'S INNOVATION**

There is a tendency to plant coffee trees down steep slopes, often causing very difficult physical labor to hand pick coffee cherries during harvest. In addition to creating difficulty for pickers, Carlos observed that it promoted run-off and soil erosion despite the fact that it's the most common technique used by many coffee producers. Naturally many high elevation coffee farms have steep volcanic slopes to work with. When Carlos asked multiple agronomists about this practice, he never found a thorough explanation as to why it is done. So in true Pola fashion, he did his own thing. He began to create terraced horizontal rows which helps retain moisture in the soil by decreasing run-off and limiting erosion. On areas of his farm where he needed to renovate (especially after the devastation of Coffee Rust or "Roya" in 2012), he committed entirely to this new method. He told us that tiered rows have made hand-picking much easier especially for elderly workers. This is just one example of Pola's tendency to ask a lot of questions, push the boundaries, and improvise, finding better ways of doing things. The risks he took in trying something new created a win-win-win; happier coffee trees, happier pickers, and overall environmental health.