

COFFEE ORIGIN

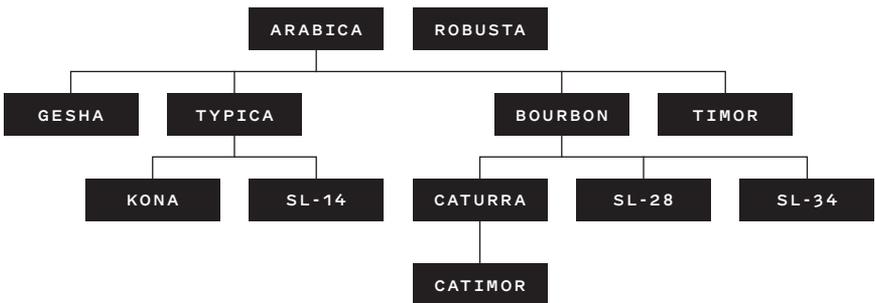
The world coffee trade has evolved considerably throughout the past one hundred years, especially in last few decades. Just thirty years ago, finding out specifics about the origin of a coffee was very difficult to achieve. Today, many roasters work directly with the farms themselves, allowing us an abundance of information about the coffee and its processing. All of these things are aspects of the bean that affect its taste in different ways, and having this information has allowed us to understand the complexities of these variables much more.



■ = COFFEE BELT

VARIETALS

Varietals refer to the different members of the coffee plant's family tree, while most varietals can be traced back to a specific part of the world; they are now grown more or less indiscriminately wherever coffee is grown.



Above are just several examples of the dozens and dozens of varietals that grow around the world. Often times, as we'll discuss in the next section, due to the nature of cultivation in many parts of the world, a harvest that is processed and shipped will often times end up being a blend of 2-4 varietals.

As with all agriculture, certain varietals are more sought after than others, such as Gesha; while others, while possessing delicious qualities, are quite common, such as Caturra or Bourbon. One of the reasons that varietals such as Gesha are so sought after, and therefore expensive, are the unique conditions required for harvesting.

COUNTRY, REGION, AND FARM

This is where most people, especially consumers, get the general idea of what to expect from a coffee's flavor. Though assuming a coffee's flavor based on something as vague as a country can be a bit too enthusiastic, regions can be very telling when it comes to these details, as things such as general elevation and soil can be very telling about a coffee's flavor to an experienced palate when combined with knowledge of varieties and other variables.

When a coffee is processed in a cooperative manner, there can be a mixture of varieties and a relatively large area of origin. At the Ejo Heza Women's Cooperative, a processing facility in the Western Province of Rwanda, coffee is pooled together from many small communal and backyard farms. This very often leads to a blend of several different varieties being processed together.

Micro-lots, such as Luiz Carlos Basso's farm Sitio Nossa Senhora Aparecida in Brazil, are small, controlled plots of land that can be traced to the exact place where it was grown. They usually offer more consistency with varieties as well as more detail about aspects of its growth and cultivation.

PROCESSING & FERMENTATION

Processing and fermentation are two terms used interchangeably at times in the coffee industry, but they have distinct differences:

Fermentation refers to the natural occurrence of microbes affecting the coffee before and during the processing. Different processes make a variety of uses of this fermentation, but the exact role it plays in the coffee's flavor has yet to be nailed down by scientists.

Processing is the method with the farmer or processing facility uses to take the coffee bean from the actual fruit of the coffee plant that is initially harvested. How it's done can have a great effect on the way a coffee ends up tasting after its journey from farm to cup. Different processes bring out different properties from the bean, from conventional to obscure.

Washed process is the most widely used process for coffee, and is very self-explanatory, with the coffee bean being picked from the fruit, washed, and dried.

There are many variations in the drying process, and farmers attempt different methods to experiment with things such as fermentation, light exposure, temperature, or moisture content. One example of this is cold fermentation process, pioneered by Rodrigo Sanchez Valencia and his team at the Finca Monteblanco farm in San Adolfo, Colombia: depulped beans are kept in a cold room to prolong fermentation, resulting in more complex flavor.

Natural process, or dry process, is when the coffee fruit is dried onto the bean. This process is helped along by the natural fermentation taking place as the fruit dries, provided a distinct fruit forward flavor once it has been roasted.

Honey process, or pulped natural process, is when the coffee fruit is skinned, but the mucilage of the fruit is left behind to dry onto the bean. This provides a similar juicy and fruity aspect as a natural coffee, but the flavor is overall less intensely instilled in the bean.