

# Navigating Origins

## JAVA BY MARK McKEE

THE STORY OF COFFEE would not be complete without discussing Java, Indonesia's fourth-largest island and the place where more than half of the country's population lives. Java's coffee has a long history. In 1696, the Dutch governor of Malabar in southern India sent arabica coffee seedlings to the Dutch governor of Batavia, now known as Jakarta. The seedlings were planted with the hope of producing coffee for the first time outside of the Arabian Peninsula, but the crop failed due to flooding. Three years later, a second shipment of seedlings were sent, planted and cultivated. The plants flourished in the rich volcanic soil and, in 1711, the first exports were sent from West Java to Europe by the Dutch East India Company, known as VOC.

Java is part of the oldest blend of coffee we know, Mocha Java. Yemen was the first country to export coffee and controlled coffee trading until the Dutch were able to obtain a coffee plant. Though many associate the term Mocha with chocolate, it is a reference to the Yemen port where coffee was first exported. Because

coffee plants were cultivated on Java and exported from Yemen, it was natural to create the world's first blend: Mocha Java.

For many years, Java produced much of the world's supply of coffee, making the word "Java" synonymous with coffee. The Dutch focused on planting arabica on the island, but by the 1870s, coffee rust had decimated most of the arabica trees. Farmers selected hardy liberica and robusta plants to replace arabica in the lower elevations, and today robusta still dominates the island's production. Arabica is now grown in higher, drier regions, including the volcanic Ijen Plateau in East Java, on old colonial plantations.



Photo by Mark McKee

### JAVA COFFEE

Java has all the essentials to quality coffee—volcanic soil, climate and producer education, as well as attention to processing. The two major areas on Java's eastern side are Semarang, a bustling port city that produces mainly robusta coffee, and Surabaya, located on the Ijen Plateau southwest of Bondowoso, a rural area with peaks and valleys that produces excellent arabica coffee.

Government estate Java dates back to the Dutch colonial era, when large plantations were established on the island. After World War I, Indonesia became an independent country, and its new government created a department called the PTP to revive and manage the old arabica plantations. The nationalized PTP estates produce about 85 percent of the coffee in East Java, in addition to tea, cocoa, rubber and flowers. More than 10,000 people work for PTP Nusantara

XII, which regulates working hours and provides primary education, housing and health services for its workers and their families.

The most noted coffees in Java come from four small, long-standing farms under the PTP umbrella: Blawan, Djampit, Kayumas and Pancoer. These coffees, grown around 4,800 feet on the Ijen Plateau, offer distinct characteristics particular to their microclimate and processing method. PTP estate-grown Java is fully washed—a rarity in Indonesia.

Other coffee plantations on the eastern part of the island are known as private estates. These coffees are grown at lower elevations and are not as meticulously processed as those from the PTP estates. Many producers use a wet-hulling method to process their coffees. The cherry is pulped, and the mucilage-covered bean is rinsed and sun-dried on patios in parchment until it reaches about 35 percent moisture. Next, the parchment is removed and dried again until the moisture content reaches 12 percent to 15 percent. Wet hulling gives the coffee sweeter, fruitier flavors than the PTP coffees.

### WEST JAVA EMERGES

Some of the most promising changes in the development of Java coffee are happening in the west, in an area called Pangalengan. Private growers and an increasing number of smallholders are planting arabica on land around Mt. Pangalengan. This agricultural area is in the northwest part of Java, about 50 kilometers from West Java's capital, Bandung. With fertile soil provided by volcanic mountains, Pangalengan has the potential to become a key agricultural area. Villagers and private growers lease most of this land from the Department of Forestry.

"West Java agricultural systems have been historically focused more on tea cultivation than coffee,"

notes Alun Evans, technical adviser for Merdeka Coffee, a roasting company in West Java. "There are a number of huge tea plantations, complete with processing facilities, that are found in a belt covering the highland areas from Jakarta to Bandung and beyond."

Today in West Java there are just 3,000 hectares of arabica trees planted, many of which are still young seedlings but are expected to reach maturity within the next two years. The Indonesian government has become involved and is preparing an additional 32,000 hectares of land for arabica. The government is also involved in educating the farmers, teaching them the importance of using proper agricultural methods and taking care of the land. Four distinctly different varieties of arabica coffee are being planted: Andung Sari (tends to have a bit more spice), Linea S (fuller in body), Kartika and Sigararuntang (both have pronounced chocolate and spice notes). Not all varieties are available for export; many of the trees are still young, and the yield is limited.

Despite the high quality of their coffee, many farmers in these experimental areas in West Java are not able to support themselves on the small amount they are paid for their crop. A local coffee exporter, Nataniel Charis of Morning Glory Coffee International, has been setting up "direct-trade" relationship coffee from West Java. Direct trade coffee comes directly from the farmers, eliminating many of the layers that occur during the processing and harvesting of coffee. With direct-trade purchasing, roasters and coffee buyers communicate with producers on a regular basis, purchase coffee at above-market prices and share producer and price information with customers. Coffee buyers and customers are able to follow every step of the process, from cherry to cup.

Charis began to teach farmers about processing and encourage them to drink quality coffee in their homeland. "[I] tell them to pick only the red cherry instead of the green," Charis says. "We [teach] them that every green bean has its own character. Finally, during sorting and grading ... we educate them to differentiate between primary and secondary defects."

Charis visited coffee farms in Sulawesi, Sumatra, Bali and Papua New Guinea, educating himself and taking courses in coffee to help the farmers he saw struggling in West Java. He pays farmers a premium for



direct-trade coffee—about \$30,000 rupiah per kilogram (approximately \$1.50 per pound), or about 25 percent to 35 percent higher than the going rate. Charis roasts this coffee at his shop Bandung; he also teaches cupping techniques to the farmers and to consumers in Indonesia, educating them about their own coffee.

Local coffee companies, including Morning Glory and Merdeka Coffee, have invested in grassroots training resources to improve farmer education and increase quality. In addition, says Evans, "the Department of Agriculture has been very active in an upstream role of helping to get the finished coffee to market."

### ROASTING/CUP PROFILE

Roasting Java coffee can be a challenge because it does not let loose of oils until late in the roasting process. The roaster operator must pay close attention to the bean during the roasting cycle, not trusting or observing the temperature as much as the bean development. The beans are consistent in size and will roast evenly.

Taking Java to a careful light to medium roast will bring out the flavors of honey, pecans, cashews and almonds, along with a mild floral note and medium body. A dark roast will exhibit characteristics of dark chocolate, spice and complexity. Many roasters will use this coffee in a blend. It fits well with an Ethiopian, as it tends to tame down the high notes of the African coffee. It also pairs with Yemeni coffee, which allows the complexity of both coffees to shine with a full body, hints of chocolate and slight cherry notes.

### CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

What does the future hold for Java coffee? The answer seems simple: Continue to develop a quality product, using agronomists to help educate and train the producers. However, the answer is not that simple. The Indonesian government provides workers at the PTP Java estates with housing, education and health care to supplement their wages, but for many farmers elsewhere, supporting their families on coffee remains a challenge.

"Only around 12 percent of Arabica being grown in Java comes from PTPN estates, the bulk of the remainder from smallholders," says Evans. Traditionally, brokers have purchased this smallholder-grown arabica and finished in the port cities for overseas export. In addition, the proximity of Indonesia's largest cities, Jakarta and Bandung, have had a negative effect on agricultural production. Evans adds, "Historically low prices for

### JAVA FACTS

POPULATION 124 million

AREA 49,255 square miles (127,570 square kilometers)

LOCATION In the southern region of Indonesia, southwest of Sumatra and directly south of Sulawesi.

CAPITAL Jakarta

LANGUAGE Javanese, Sundanese, Madurese and Bahasa Indonesia.

MONETARY UNIT Rupiah

produce, including coffee, has meant over the last two decades there has been a net outflow of labor into the cities."

Yet private producers and smallholders continue to develop their knowledge about coffee-growing techniques and their place in the specialty market. "Over the last decade, more and more communities are working on selling a particular coffee under a sub-origin umbrella, rather than contributing to a catchment pool of arabica which essentially is a blend," Evans says. "The advent of modern communication tools along with a rapid development of specialty coffee in Indonesia is aiding the farming communities."

Due to work by organizations like the Australian Center for International Agricultural Research and local exporters like Charis—as well as coffee roasters and buyers around the world—Java will keep its storied coffee history alive for generations to come.

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