The Lean Times

I don’t mean to go on and on about the crop cycle, but here I go again. We get an occasional customer who resists the preponderance of information on our web site that coffee is, indeed, an agricultural product. Yes, it comes from a shrubby tree with beautiful, deep green leaves and lovely white flowers that come and go in the course of a week. And the fruit that emerges comes and goes too, as does the really spectacular, small lots of coffee that we manage to corral into our warehouse.

Dear imaginary and stubborn coffee lover; we are not talking about laundry detergent or soda pop here. It’s not a matter of simply ordering more and stocking the shelves full. There is an ebb and flow to our list of coffee offerings that, naturally, reflects the crop cycle itself.

So where are we at? We are in the gap when the really good mid-harvest Central American coffees began to sell out. A quality conscious company like ours that only buys based on cupping will not go out and buy replacement lots from what the brokers have to offer. Yes, I could go out at any time and get more Costa Rican or Salvador or Panama. But the green coffee left after all the good stuff goes is not something that interest me, nor do I think it would interest you. The range of coffee that I would even consider buying from brokers is less than 5% of what they offer, meaning that there are thousands and thousands of bags out there that are Specialty coffee by grade, that come in nice bags, that might be estate coffee, but that do not have exemplary “origin character.” My hypothesis is that a home roasting person who decides to spend money on a roaster, and time to roast and brew correctly, and time reading and learning a bit more about coffee, is not going to want to buy average green coffee even if it costs $1 per lb. less. You will NEVER get an extraordinary cup from an ordinary green coffee. Sure, you can ruin a good coffee in the roasting or brewing, but that is another can of worms. It’s the old “garbage-in, garbage-out” maxim.

Lastly: What is the wise green coffee buyer (you) going to focus on in the December – January. Well, the current Central offering is super-solid coffees, and the CoE El Salvadors are my favorites. Look for La Minita to disappear soon until it comes back in late March/ early April along with the other new crop Centrals. We do have one more incoming late crop Central that I really, really like: Guatemala Barillas from the Nuevo Bullaj Co-op. But that is the last new Central until March or so. (Panamas flowered early so we might see that in late February this year). If you like Centrals, look more to the South in this period. New crop Bolivia is going to be really nice, along with the incoming Colombians. We are on the verge of new crop Brasil and I have some super special stuff lined up. The sometimes spectacular Poco Fundo is the first to come, along with Carmo Estate Peaberry and a nice (bright!) lot of 100% Yellow Bourbon seedstock from 1200 meters in the Espirito Santo Estate. Indonesia is a good place to start although the Sumatras will be late this year. Sulawesi is due soon. Estate Kona due in late January.

What’s a Technivorm?

Hint: It’s not a computer worm…

I have known about the Dutch-made Technivorm coffee brewers for years. Maybe I was just too lazy to do my research on their well-known brew quality and straightforward design. Maybe I just didn’t want to carry an electric drip brewer no matter how good it supposedly was. (I am a diehard French Press and Vacuum Brew fan and prefer manual brew methods to machines).

It was in a coffee lab in the city of Pinhal, Brasil where I was reminded again that the Technivorm might be worth looking into. We were evaluating some estate coffees, and I noticed the rather utilitarian coffeemaker beside their lab espresso machine. You don’t see many drip brewers in Brasil, so I asked the cuppers what they thought of it. “Great,” they said, “It’s how we brew all our samples for final evaluation in the European market.”

Europe … I have heard of the place, and of their fine coffees. (Sarcasm). But with or without a continental pedigree, I was impressed they used a home machine for lab evaluation. I came back and contacted the company in Holland … and that was that. I finally found an automatic electric drip brewer that I really like, and that we use daily in the warehouse.

You don’t need an expensive electric appliance to brew great drip coffee. Manual, pour-over drip brewing with Chemex or a filter cone work well, as does a French Press. But most people in our fair land brew their coffee in electric coffee makers, and ironically, most of them can barely brew a decent cup, or fail miserably (I am talking about the machines, not the people using them)! Cheap drip brewers invariably fail to brew coffee at the correct temperature. When coffee is brewed at a low temperature (most home electric drip brewers reach only 185 degrees) the result is a dullness of the higher, more vivid cup tones, and incomplete extraction of the coffee flavors overall.
The Technivorm is certified by the Specialty Coffee Association of America (SCAA) to brew at the correct 200 degrees Fahrenheit. Like many brewers it uses a cone-shaped filter that improves the extraction of coffee flavors from the grounds. (A flat-bottom filter is fine if you have a sprinkler-type brew head, but home machines never do!) All this results in more intense brewed coffee than comparable home machines when using the exact same amount of ground coffee in each.

The Technivorm models are all simple, straightforward machines that do one thing ... and do it very well! They all have a whopping 1475 watts, 13 amp draw which means they have the power to make water hot in a very short period of time. (Only a handful of coffee makers are rated over 1200 watts, and none are as powerful as the Technivorm). The machine is becoming well-known, and has had two articles of praise by Sam Gugino in Wine Spectator. But like I said, you can make great coffee without a fancy appliance... If you are, however, set on electric drip coffee makers, but disappointed with the results (and with their cheap, throw-away construction) you might want to read more about the Technivorm on our web site - Tom

Check our web page for the most up-to-date offering list!

Sweet Maria's Coffee
1455 64th Street, Emeryville CA 94608
web: www.sweetmarias.com
email: info@sweetmarias.com

The Holidays and afterward...
We are working 8 days a week during the holidays this year ... seriously, it's not fun. But at least we have good coffee to drink to ease the pain of shipping and packing! We will be closing on December 23rd until January 3rd. We will have the web site ordering turned off from the 23rd to the 26th. Then we will turn it back on, but nobody will be at the warehouse to pack orders until the 3rd so be aware of the delay. We have tried hard to process orders quickly and to use a new system to double-check that the contents are correct. Mistakes in orders can mess up gift giving, we know, and create a lot of frustration. We think the way we are double-checking has eliminated mistakes, but alas, we are human and we do err. Let us know about breakage or mistakes and we will correct the situation as soon as possible. - Maria