

PROCESSING COFFEE

In last month's newsletter, we covered roasting techniques and roast levels. This month, we'll be taking a look at the path coffee beans take from the coffee bush to the roaster.

Fruiting plants, coffee bushes produce bright red cherries. The coffee bean is the seed inside the fruit. Because the cherries ripen at different rates, high-quality coffees are harvested by hand. Farmers select cherries based on color, discarding any which have ripened beyond the target, and leaving those which have not sufficiently ripened for later harvest.

After harvesting, the coffee must be processed to remove the fruit from the bean and dry the bean for shipping to a roaster. This month's coffee is a *wet-process* coffee, following a method that uses water to remove the bulk of the cherry from the bean within.

The first step in the wet process is *pulping*. The beans are placed into a large tank of water, then forced through a small screen, tearing the bulk of the cherry away from the bean. A substantial portion remains, however, so the beans proceed into the *fermentation* stage. As they sit for 24 to 36 hours, yeasts and other microorganisms break down the cellulose of the remaining fruit.

The farmers must carefully watch the beans during this stage—if fermentation

goes on for too long, the beans may develop a sour flavor. Using the texture of the fermenting beans as their guide, the farmers stop fermentation when the remaining fruit has broken down sufficiently to rinse off, and send the beans on to be *washed*.

Next, after washing removes the last of the fruit, the beans must *dry*. Sometimes left in the sun, other times left under cover, the beans sit for a month or more, turned every few hours by rake or by hand, until they dry to a moisture content of less than 10%. Finally, the dried beans are *hulled*, removing a layer of parchment-like skin, before being delivered to market.

The *dry process*, common in arid coffee-growing regions, is much simpler. Beans are simply left out to dry for several weeks, then the dried cherry husk is removed mechanically.

Wet-process coffees tend to have bright, clean flavors, emphasizing the sweeter notes present in high-quality coffee. Dry-process coffees, because they are easier to make, are most commonly sold as large-batch, commodity coffee, with little care taken to ensure good flavor. Carefully-tended dry-process coffees, however, show intense fruity and floral flavors, because the bean spends such a long time interacting with the fruit as both dry together.

This year's first four shipments are all wet-process coffees. We hope to include a dry-process coffee later this year.

THIS MONTH'S COFFEE

This month's coffee selection is from China Alta, a small village near the city of Ibagué in the Tolima region of Colombia. Several small family-run farms in that area sell through a cooperative in China Alta itself.

Colombian coffee has a reputation as premium coffee. This is largely the result of good marketing by the National Federation of Coffee Growers of Colombia. 'Colombian' does not necessarily mean 'good'. Like all coffee-growing regions, Colombia has a distinct terroir, and this coffee is an excellent example of it.

Roasted to a dark City+, this, in the same vein as last month's Guatemala, has a bright sweetness at the start, giving way to notes of berry, apple, and spice.

That's what our supplier says, anyway. Your roastmaster mostly gets the sweetness, with a hint of complexity beneath it. Enjoy!

BONUS: COFFEE FRUIT TEA

Also included in this month's shipment is a small number of dried, de-seeded coffee cherries, which our supplier sold as tea. We here at TLJCC world headquarters tried it and found that it wasn't very flavorful, but we included a serving anyway as a curiosity.



Coffee cherries, from unripe to over-ripe.