

Coffee

THE NEWSLETTER
OF VIRMAX CAFÉ



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FACES

Welcome to a new edition of Coffee Faces. We are extremely happy to announce that on February 1st we will be finally launching our new website at www.virmax.com

After more than six months of working hand in hand with designers and programmers our webpage project has finally come to life. Apart from upgrading our current website and of providing general information about our company, we have aimed to achieve two other objectives with our new site: to provide accurate and up to date information about the Colombian coffee industry and our coffees; and to provide added value and more information for all our clients.

The first goal is achieved thanks to what we believe is a groovy new layout, clearer texts and many more pictures, making the website much more interactive. It will be possible for any visitor to access plenty of background information about Colombian coffee, our latest news, our newsletter archive, as well as information about Virmax and the coffees we export.

On the other hand, and where we have invested most of our time, our clients will have secure access to an extranet where they will find complete and real time information about the coffee they have purchased from Virmax. As part of our commitment to full traceability, clients will find listings of which coffee growers have participated in the coffee lots we have shipped to them, as well as background information on each coffee grower and their farms. We believe this is a first in the coffee industry and a giant step towards what we know as traceability. We have no doubt that it will prove an invaluable source of information for all our clients.

All this is possible thanks to a powerful Intranet we have developed as part of the

whole process. Our Intranet holds all the information about the coffee grower's that we work with, including location of their farms, altitude, varieties cultivated, cupping data and many more info.

We at Virmax have always been able to know each of the growers we work with and to cup each of the individual lots that form part of a specific lot. Now, our clients will be able to put a face to each of the growers and farms that are responsible for the coffee that they buy. We like to think of it as a way for our customers of stretching and strengthening the relationships with their suppliers in the comfort of their office - or even at home!



Little by little we will be introducing more and more information about each one of the growers, including pictures of their coffee processing facilities, their family, etc.

We invite you to the inauguration of the new virmax.com on Monday February 6 at 9 AM ET. We look forward to your comments and feedback so that we can continue improving the functionality and the information of our new site.

We hope you enjoy this new edition of Coffee Faces. As always, we welcome your comments on info@virmax.com

"Sobreprecio" ceremony for Cauca growers 2

Our Latest Coffee: La Piramide Relationship Coffee™ 3

Coffee drops 4



Virmax is a proud member of the SCAA

“Sobreprecio” ceremony for Cauca growers

On January 16 we held a “Sobreprecio” ceremony in Popayán for the 92 coffee growers that participated in our Smart Project during 2005. The Smart Project was designed to find the very best coffees from the Department of Cauca and to reward those exceptional coffee growers with premium prices and personal recognition. As part of the project, all coffee lots are cupped and awarded a score from 0 to 100. The ten best lots are then re-cupped and prizes are awarded to the best three lots. In 2005 the winners were:

- Mr. Jair Garcia from El Tambo, with an 11 bag lot (Planadas farm)
- Mr. Alcibiades Garcia from El Tambo (and uncle of Mr. Jair Garcia) with a 7 bag lot (Almaguer farm)
- Mr. Carlos Chango from Piendamó with an 8 bag lot (Veraneras farm)

These three lots were exported separately as boutique lots and so far have achieved outstanding reviews. The Almaguer Lot of Mr. Alcibiades Garcia received a score of 93 in the January edition of *The Coffee Review* (www.coffeereview.com), the highest score received so far by a Colombian coffee in this prestigious website.

Coffee FACES

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Published by:

Virmax Limited
Unit 374
78 Marylebone High Street
London W1U 5AP
United Kingdom

Tel. +44 (0)207 939 9955
Fax +44 (0)87 0120 7181

E-mail:
newsletter@virmax.com
www.virmax.com

Designed by:

© Marca Registrada
Diseño Gráfico Ltda.
Calle 74A No. 22 - 31, of. 311
Bogotá, Colombia
www.mrenlinea.com



The three winners: (from left to right) Carlos Chango (and his daughter), Jair Garcia and Alcibiades Garcia holding their certificates and commemorative plaques.

Mr. Jair Garcia, the overall winner, was invited by Intelligentsia Coffee Roasters to Chicago, where besides basking in -10 degrees Celsius temperatures he visited the roasting works, Intelligentsia's shops and had a chance to talk to some of their customers.

In general, all participating coffee growers on average received a 21% premium over the internal market price, while the first three lots received a 100% premium over the internal market price. All the figures were reviewed with the growers in order to guarantee the transparency of the process.

In 2006 we are going to have our third version of the Smart project to find the best coffees of Cauca. Thanks to the outstanding results of the past two editions, this year we are expecting to double the participation and to find many more outstanding coffee lots. ☺

Our Latest Coffee:

La Piramide Relationship Coffee™

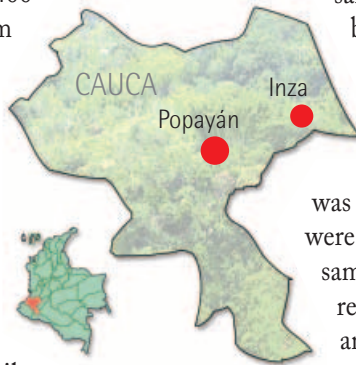
In July 2005 I met in Popayán Mr. Giovanni Castillo, president of the *Asociación de Productores de Café del Oriente Caucaño* (ASORCAFE) who was interested in developing new business relationships. This association is comprised by about 400 coffee growers from the municipality of Inza, located in the East of the Department of Cauca. We knew that the coffee from the Inza area had great potential so we were immediately attracted by the possibility of establishing a relationship with ASORCAFE.

As I was talking with Giovanni I instantly remembered the coffee from Inza: extremely sweet, similar to tasting *guarapo* (a drink made from raw sugar cane), very soft but with a brilliant acidity, with hints of plums and red apples and a very sweet and lasting aftertaste. Back in November 2003 we had the opportunity of exporting a 50-bag lot of Inza coffee under the *Abirama Relationship Coffee™* name and from that moment on the Inza cup profile was carved in my memory. We had loved that coffee but had never been able to develop a direct relationship with the growers of that region. As it turns out, ASORCAFE's members were the producers of those 50 bags.

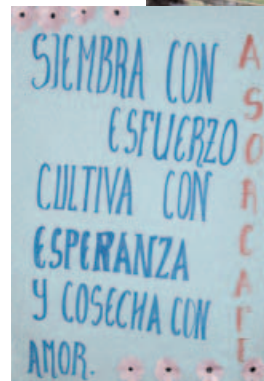
Based on our knowledge of the region's potential to produce amazing coffee, and very excited about the possibilities of finally being able to develop a

direct relationship with growers from Inza, I invited Giovanni to our office in Bogotá and asked him to bring with him some individual samples. Two weeks later, there he was holding a large bag which contained more than 100 samples from the same number of members. It took us about a month to cup those 100 plus samples, but it was worth it! There were some excellent samples, with lots of red apples, plums and that reminiscent *guarapo* taste that we have only tasted in this region. Some of the best samples even had some nice spicy notes, like red pepper and paprika and a caramel body.

Next step was to arrange a trip to the region in order to get to know the growers better and to have a firsthand feeling of the region. So in October 2005 I travelled from Popayán to Inza, a 100 km drive which lasts about three-hours. It is an amazing drive, since you begin at 1800 masl in the *meseta* of Popayán and climb over the central cordillera of the Andes up to 3500 masl to the Paramo of Guanacas, where you start the descent



The main park of Inza, Cauca



towards the town of Inza, which is located at 1700 masl. The vegetation throughout the trip is very beautiful, as you get to see lots of *frailejones*, small lagoons and many animal species (birds in particular), many of them endemic from Colombia.

Giovanni and the rest of the board of directors of ASORCAFE welcomed me in the town of Inza and we immediately started with a visit of the whole coffee-growing area. Our first stop was the La Estrella farm, owned by Mr. Neftali Fajardo, whose coffee had achieved third place in the first Colombian Cup of Excellence™ held in February 2005. Mr. Fajardo is one of the founding members of ASORCAFE and it shows: His farm is definitely an exemplary one; very healthy trees, good processing infrastructure and very clean and organized.

We then headed East towards the towns of Pedregal and San Antonio (still within the municipality of Inza). On our way there we stopped at several farms, all of them were very small with a maximum size of just 2 hectares. Most of the coffee trees are from the

Panoramic of the coffee growing region of Pedregal



Our Latest Coffee: *La Piramide Relationship Coffee™*

From page 3

Caturra variety, although you can also find some *Typica* trees here and there. There was a considerable amount of shade as well. The harvest was about to begin, so the trees were full of cherries, although most mentioned that this harvest (their main one) would be smaller than usual. Some farms also had considerable flowering, meaning that the May to July 2006 harvest (their fly-crop) would be better than usual.

After a two-hour drive we arrived to the town of Pedregal, where ASORCAFE has one of their three purchasing points (the others are located in the towns of Inza and San Antonio). Their warehouse was really something else: it used to be a discothèque so it still had all the lights and even a mirror ball!! After meeting with the local membership we continued our way up and down the hills for one more hour until we arrived to the town of San Antonio. After lunch we went to the local school to meet with over fifty coffee growers. It turns out that they had arranged a meeting with some of the members of

In December 2005 we sold our first container of *La Piramide Relationship Coffee™*. As we write these lines, we are finishing the purchase of all the parchment coffee necessary for this first container. In order to guarantee the quality of this shipment and since ASORCAFE does not have a cupping lab, we sent one of our cupping teams and all the equipment necessary to Pedregal to set up a

temporary cupping lab. This has been a great opportunity to find some very good lots as well as to teach the growers what problems their coffee has and how they can solve them.

If you are interested in trying this new coffee, please let us know and we will be happy to send you a sample from our first exported lot.

the group so that I could talk to them about Virmax and about specialty coffees. As usual, it was a very productive meeting and a good way to learn more about them. At the end of the meeting some growers handed me samples.

That was the last stop of my trip to Inza. There, I said goodbye to my new friends but before I left I asked them what name they wanted for their coffee. They replied: "La Piramide". I was surprised of that name and enquired the reason behind this name, to which they replied: "on the way back to Popayán you will find out why". So I got in the car and we headed back to Popayán, taking a different route than the one we



La Piramide

had come from. It was starting to get dark but when we approached Pedregal the driver stopped the car and asked me to take a look at the scenery. When I looked out the window I discovered the reason for that name. I took a picture of it so that you too can find out why. ☺

COFFEE DROPS

Renovated cupping lab in Bogotá

We are in the process of renovating our Bogotá cupping lab. The company has grown so much in the last year that our old lab was getting small and crowded. Our new facilities will have the best equipment and three times the working space of our old lab. We hope to have everything in place for March 2006.

20,000 bags and counting

In 2005 we achieved the 20,000 bag mark, with just under half that figure shipped during 2005. All of those bags were 100% high quality, fully traceable Colombian coffee. We are committed to continue working hard with our coffee suppliers to continue to provide the world's most demanding coffee roasters the best Colombian coffees.

New warehouse manager in Pitalito

In December 2005 we hired a new warehouse manager for our Pitalito warehouse. Leonardo Henao was the person chosen for that important job. He is an Agroindustrial Engineer from the Universidad del Tolima and spent six months with us as an intern before being hired. Leonardo is in charge of doing a first physical screening of the coffee lots and of managing all the logistical operation in Pitalito. We wish him success in his new position.