

# Coffee

## FACES

THE MONTHLY NEWSLETTER  
OF VIRMAX CAFÉ



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## BOSTON PREVIEW...

AS MOST of you know, this month the Specialty Coffee Association of America (SCAA) will be holding their 15th annual Conference and Exhibition. It is by far the largest gathering of coffee professionals in the world.

This year, Virmax along with a group of the Colombian coffee growers who provide us with their high quality coffee, will be attending the event and taking advantage of the opportunity to meet personally with some of our North American customers and friends.

For us it is a great opportunity to continue to spread our message across the industry. The message being that quality should be paramount in the future of the Specialty Coffee market.

For the growers, attending the exhibition represents a number of opportunities. Besides from the commercial opportunities that might arise, they get a chance to learn about the North American coffee market: what clients are looking for, what is the latest "trend", what are coffee growers from other countries doing, how their coffee compares to others from other countries, etc. In short, the SCAA Conference and Exhibition is a unique learning opportunity for the growers. At the same time, this experience will allow them to get a clearer picture of how the market works. Hopefully, growers will then go back to their communities and transmit a message of hard work, of continuous improvement in terms of quality of their coffee beans, along with a message of hope and opportunities for a better life.

One of the main factors that withhold the increase of quality is lack of information, or rather misinformation, which is a common denominator for small growers. Only a small percentage of them actually are aware of the factors that allow their entrance into the growing specialty market. By attending this event (and, hopefully, many more in the future) growers can internalise a lot of information, opening their eyes to a world full of opportunities.

The above, combined with continuous education must be a priority for the development of quality. By teaching growers proper techniques, they will be able to obtain a noticeable improvement. By encouraging them to open their eyes to the market we can generate a further incentive that will compel growers to listen and to adopt the recommendations of professional cuppers and industry experts.

We at Virmax are committed to developing an entrepreneurial culture among the Colombian coffee growers, where they can be the drivers of innovation and improvements. We firmly believe that this is the only path into the Specialty Market.

We look forward to meet with you in Boston and to introduce you to some of the Colombian coffee growers that are beginning to make a difference.

In our next edition of Coffee Faces, you will find a full report of our trip, as well as a collection of the growers' impressions of the trade show. In the meantime, it is time to get our suitcases, our coffee samples and our sombreros ready to roll... See you in New England!!! ☘

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Specialty Coffee  
Association Of America

Virmax is a proud member  
of the SCAA

# BUENAVENTURA, PORT

By Alejandro Cadena

Buenaventura is Colombia's largest maritime port. 60% of Colombia's imports are unloaded at Buenaventura's berths, while 70% of Colombian Coffee is loaded here - representing a mere seven million bags a year!!!!



**B**UENAVENTURA was founded in 1540 by the Spanish conquistadors that were looking to find the elusive El Dorado. It officially became a port in 1719, when the Spanish Crown designated Buenaventura as one of their terminals in the Pacific Ocean. Since then, it has evolved to become one of South America's most important ports, having a strategic location, ideal for transshipments, consolidation of cargo and Pacific Rim routes.

Traditionally, Colombian Coffee must pass a quality control before departure, which is done at the port facilities. As exporters, we are aware of such controls, and make sure that our coffee not only passes the tests but exceeds the required standards.

A couple of weeks ago, while finalizing the milling process of our Café Bohemio lot, an eighteen-wheeler truck arrived to pick up the coffee bags. Seeing this as the best chance I was going to get to get to know Buenaventura and the perfect opportunity to see first-hand the process that our coffee goes through at the port I decided to join with Mr. Ramirez, the truck driver, who offered me a ride.

I must admit that travelling in a big, noisy eighteen-wheeler is one experience I will never forget. Besides listening to traditional Colombian music such as *vallenatos* for the duration of the trip, and sharing with Mr. Ramirez a tip or two on proper coffee brewing techniques, I managed to see the landscape from a totally different perspective.

Finally, after a gruelling three-hour trip, we arrived to Buenaventura. Upon arrival, I dropped by the office of our customs agent, Mr. Vicente Agudelo. Vicente has been instrumental in getting our coffee shipped on-time, and I have spoken to him many times over the phone, so it was really nice to finally meet him and discuss with him the latest developments.

Unfortunately, by the time I arrived into Buenaventura, the port was already full for the day, so our coffee did not get the chance to enter immediately. After a couple of really cold beers with Vicente, we decided that the best thing to do was to get a good night sleep and make it an early morning. So I could get a chance to see the whole process.

The following morning, I finally got a chance to observe the pre-export procedures. Mr. Ramirez met me just outside the



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port, so we entered into the coffee terminal, where the FNC quality control and warehouses are located. As soon as we parked, the unloading process began. Before palletising, a representative sample is taken from each bag. The bags are then taken into the re-weighting station, where the shipped weight is recorded.

The lot sample is then taken to the FNC's port quality control lab. There, experienced staff (they normally cup some 30 samples per day) will perform a defect, screen and cup analysis. If any of the lot samples do not comply with any of the minimum norms established, the whole lot is rejected.

While talking to the terminal staff I realized that even though we are Colombia's newest coffee exporters, the cleanliness of our coffees –locals colloquially refer to coffee with no defects as “leche” milk– as well as our colourful and creative coffee bags, has made us famous among port workers.

Once I got to the quality control lab, I learned that (as I expected) our coffee had been approved, while other lots were being rejected. The quality control director gave me a proper tour of the facilities and explained to me the basics of the process. It is based on standards set out by the FNC in terms of physical defects, screen size and cup tasting. The Quality Control Director mentioned that Virmax's coffees had the best cup profiles of all the samples for that day. While it is still a personal opinion, I'll take his word for it.

As I left the terminal I remembered that I had made plans for lunch with Vicente. He told me that Buenaventura's Marlin is the best in the Pacific, and since you cannot eat fresh fish in Bogotá I was really looking forward to having it for lunch. Unfortunately, I was delayed at the port while talking to



As we mentioned in our last edition of Coffee Faces, the excitement is growing with regards to the Mitaca season. The first coffee cherries are being picked and processed as we speak, and so far we have located five potential new coffees from six new groups (“grupos”, in Spanish):

- ◆ Grupo La Victoria de Santa Maria - sweet notes with high acidity and medium body
- ◆ Grupo Chia Campoalegre - a sweet floral flavour similar to those of the coffee tree
- ◆ Grupo Teruel - almond like notes with medium acidity and medium body
- ◆ Grupo Café Floral de mi Tierra - very smooth flavour with floral notes
- ◆ Grupo Los Cauchos - persistent malt aroma and flavour that confer it lots of character
- ◆ Café La Union, grown by ASPROUNION - for full details please see our previous issue - a delicate citric flavour with a pronounced aroma and medium-high acidity.

We expect to have access to the best of the crop, having good available volumes. This will allow us to give continuity to our more established coffees, fulfilling on-going contracts, while at the same time promoting them in new markets, as well as promoting our new found gems.

We expect to have crop samples available of both the new and established coffees by the end of April. From what we have seen so far, we are certain that the Mitaca coffees will be received at least with the same kind of enthusiasm from our customers as the main crop cycle coffees were. ☺

the quality control guys, so I had to run to catch my flight back to Bogotá. Funny enough, once I got to the airport it turned out that my plane was delayed due to bad weather. If you are familiar with Murphy's Law, you will realize that that is my story with fresh fish, but that is another story.

In conclusion, even though I missed the chance to taste the famous Pacific Merlin, I managed to survey the export process and learn a great deal about Buenaventura and the last stages of the export process. Additionally, it was very comforting to learn that the hard work the growers and us put into each of our export lots is being recognized by the people in charge of making sure that quality complies with the regulations. ☺



**C**afé Bohemio is an Estate coffee grown in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada de Santa Marta. The Sierra, as is commonly known, is located next to the Caribbean ocean, in the northern coast of Colombia.

Café Bohemio is grown in four adjacent *Haciendas*, which in total cover an area of 100 hectares; of which one-third is a natural reserve. The estate itself is a self-contained community, where all resources are re-utilized: manure from farm animals (horses, cows and chickens) is used as part of the organic compost; eggs, milk and meat produced by these animals is sold at low prices to the farm workers, who also benefit from having a minimum guaranteed income and housing; and there are common areas within the farm for the cultivation of secondary crops (such as fruits and staple crops) which are divided among all the estate's workers.

The salty sea breeze, as well as the humidity and temperature that the proximity to the ocean confer this region, are the main reason behind Café Bohemio's unique cup profile. In general, we can talk about a more bodied coffee with a subtle hint of tobacco and a nice, although delicate, acidity.

Café Bohemio was a late discovery of this year's crop, and having only one crop cycle during the year, we were unable to fully exploit its potential over the season. However, don't despair, we managed to get our hands on one lot that is currently clearing customs in Europe. By now, you should have received pre-shipment samples of this lot. If you haven't, please make sure you contact our London office.

*If you would like to additional information about this coffee, please contact our London office at [london@virmax.com](mailto:london@virmax.com), or +44 (0) 207 939 9955.*

## OFFERING SHEET

### UK Warehouse

Brand	Preparation	Position	No. of Bags	Notes
La Cacia	EUR, SG	SPOT	80	R
Café Bohemio	EUR, PG	SPOT	175	E
Café del Paraíso	EUR, SG	SPOT	168	E
Timaná	EUR, PG	SPOT	70	R

### Continental Europe Warehouse

Brand	Preparation	Position	No. of Bags	Notes
La Cacia	EUR, SG	SPOT	75	R
Café Bohemio	EUR, PG	SPOT	75	E
Café del Paraíso	EUR, SG	SPOT	75	E
Timaná	EUR, PG	SPOT	25	R

Updated: April 17, 2003

#### Terminology

E: Estate  
 O: Organic  
 R: Relationship Coffee: Produced by a co-op or association of coffee growers  
 EUR: European Preparation (screen 15+)  
 PG: SCAA Premium Grade preparation  
 SEL: Select (screen 18+)  
 SG: SCAA Special Grade preparation  
 SUP: Supremo (screen 17+)

UGQ: Usual Good Quality (screen 14+)  
 AFLOAT: Coffees that are on their way to our warehouses and will be available in the next 4 weeks  
 CLEARING: coffees are clearing customs. Should be in our warehouses in about a week  
 DEL: Coffees that are supposed to be delivered the last day of the month listed  
 SHP: Coffees that are to be shipped in the month listed  
 SPOT: Coffees in our warehouse

## The Sierra Nevada of Santa Marta

The Sierra Nevada rises from the coasts of the Caribbean to approximately 5700 metres above sea level, thereby having all possible thermal floors imaginable, from sandy beaches to tropical rain forests to snow-capped mountains, all just ten degrees north of the Equator. Thanks to these characteristics, it is a unique ecosystem in the world, famous for its biodiversity.

It is also a very mysterious and mythical place. The Sierra is the homeland of two indigenous tribes: the Koguis and the Arhuacos. The members of these tribes believe in a world order based on the power of Mother Nature. They believe they were selected to be the guardians of the heart of the world, which they call *UMUMUKUNU*. *UMUMUKUNU* serves as a mirror for the rest of the planet in terms of its exploitation and general "health", reflecting wider problems such as global warming on a much minor scale.

The Koguis and Arhuacos are the big brothers of humanity, looking after the heart of the world, in a society designed to live peacefully and in total harmony with nature. The rest of civilization (i.e. us) is seen as the little brothers of civilization, unable to comprehend the inner works of Mother Nature, overexploiting its resources and unable to live in a peaceful, harmonic society. It is part of their duty as big brothers, for the Koguis and Arhuacos to observe and teach the little brothers in the ways of *UMUMUKUNU*. ☺

If you are interested in receiving samples or further information on any of our coffees, please contact us at +44(0)20 7939 9955 (London).  
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