

STANDART

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coffee / barista / ritual
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ACTS OF GEISHA-RISTA

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Willem Boot, owner of the Finca La Mula farm, felt pure joy when he was first introduced to the Geisha. Whenever he puts a cup of coffee to his lips, a feeling of comfort and happiness embraces him. Geisha, a term known primarily from the country of the rising sun, is preceded far and wide by her reputation in the coffee scene. As one of the most expensive and premium varietals in the world, it is without a doubt a coffee worthy even of the Japanese Emperor.

Whenever I taste a great cup of coffee, I feel joyful and fulfilled; after my first sensory introduction to Geisha, I sensed sheer happiness.

Why Geisha?

Geisha is unlike any other coffee I have ever tasted and my first encounter with this phenomenal variety literally turned my world upside down. Although many years ago, I can still vividly taste the flavor profile I experienced during that first memorable cupping session at the Best of Panama 2004, when Geisha was first presented to our panel of international coffee tasters. While smelling the fragrance, I felt mesmerized by the unusual intensity and complexity of floral notes; what is this?

pondered through my mind, while smelling and tasting the astounding flavor attributes of the debutante surprise coffee. While savoring every sip and trying to dissect the intriguing aftertaste, I realized that something special was going on. Since that unforgettable tasting session, my career as a coffee professional took an interesting spin. In that same year, while traveling to Ethiopia, I started investigating the roots of Geisha. My subsequent seven year quest for the origin of the variety ultimately led us to a relatively small forest in the far west of Ethiopia, not too far from the town Gesha. I encountered thousands of butterflies hovering around the immensely fragrant blossoms of wild growing Gesha trees. In 2007, I also took my first stab at becoming a coffee farmer by planting 6,500 Geisha trees at Finca

La Mula on the slopes of the dormant Baru volcano near the valley of Boquete in Panama. With the priceless help of coffee friends, like Graciano Cruz and Kelly Hartmann, I learned about the ups and downs of being a farmer; from the euphoria of planting the first trees to the desperate fear of loosing it all due to some rogue fungus. In the end, we conquered; my Geisha trees endured the trials of Mother Nature and we have been producing small quantities of great tasting coffee ever since.

The uniqueness of Geisha also lies in its DNA. Virtually all arabica types cultivated today share similar genetic traits due to the fact that they are direct descendants from a relatively small pool of samples selected in Yemen back in the 17th century. As we also found out through genetic research conducted by the Denver Botanic Gardens, the lineage of Geisha is very different from almost any other type of arabica coffee. Geisha was first selected in the Ethiopian highlands in the 1930s, and until 2004, the variety enjoyed a relatively obscure existence. As a result, the opportunities for cross pollination and hybridization have been relatively limited compared to other more generic specialty coffee types.

Promoting & Selling

A few years ago, while inspecting the very first harvest of La Mula, I suddenly realized that a new challenge was born: How do I successfully promote and sell these beans? This pivotal question initiated a fascinating journey into the mystique and science of roasting and brewing Geisha in order to present its paramount and ubiquitous flavor profile. Over the past two years, I discovered that unlocking the taste of Geisha and allowing the coffee to shine upon the final presentation to the consumer can be an arduous and challenging task; it requires immense finesse and concentration by the roaster and skillful preparation by the barista. On top of that, the barista must be prepared for the demanding but gratifying task of successfully promoting and delivering the promise of the Geisha beverage. Clients of third wave retail establishments around the world have already

become accustomed to top grade, custom-brewed, single origin coffees; nevertheless the market for Geisha coffee still remains largely untapped. To address this situation, I feel that Geisha producers and roasters must become much more pro-active in collaborating with baristas to develop preferred brewing protocols for their most precious beans. For sure, this will benefit the proficiency of all participants in the preparation protocols of the Geisha variety.

Let's Start Brewing

Before getting started with the preparation of the coffee, let's first verify that two essential tools for the brewing protocol are calibrated for the task at hand; the quality of water and the proper grinder. Let's assume that you have already researched how to produce the right water quality for your establishment through filtration or reverse osmosis. Here comes the finicky part; the composition of minerals in your water can greatly impact the taste of your coffee. To some degree, higher levels of magnesium ions can increase the solubility of solids and, as a result, create more depth in the flavor profile of the brew; limited levels of sodium bicarbonate (up to 100 ppm) can tremendously improve the quality of the acidity.

When it comes to grinding the Geisha beans, I use a simple rule; the slower and the more uniform, the better. Flat burrs tend to grind the beans too fast, resulting in higher levels of super fine particles in the grinding profile, while conical burrs generally produce a more uniform distribution. So far, I have obtained the best results with two manually-operated mills; the German made Zassenhaus and the more bulky American made Lido 2.

As I have experienced, the presentation of Geisha requires the completion of three successive critical acts that, when performed skillfully, will extract the unparalleled flavor of the variety and create an unforgettable customer experience that has no equal compared to the enjoyment of other coffee beverages.





ACT ONE

Trigger the client's intricate sense of curiosity by creating an eager desire to know more about the remarkable properties of the coffee. An introduction like 'today, we serve a Geisha coffee from Panama' won't do the job, mainly because consumers are generally oblivious to the 'queen of all coffees'. Preferably, try something more romantic: 'I'd like to prepare a rare and unique coffee variety that was first discovered in the highlands of Panama.' Alternatively, the barista could invoke the customer's inquisitiveness by asking: 'Have you ever smelled jasmine or rose in your coffee?' Unsurprisingly, this will launch a conversation, especially if the customer can smell a small portion of coffee grounds. As I've personally experienced, the grand majority of patrons will then proceed to order the novelty coffee despite the significantly higher price tag.



ACT TWO

Prepare Geisha in diligent, measured steps with the precision of a Japanese tea master performing a tea ceremony. This is where the skill and mastery of the barista comes into play. You don't need to be a world championship competitor to extract the essence of your coffee. Choose the right brewing strength, depending on the customer's preference and the flavor complexity of the selected Geisha. For the Chemex, I personally prefer a ratio of 1 g of Geisha to 15 ml of water; for the Kalita or V60, I usually choose 1:14 and for the Karlsbad coffee maker, which can highlight the phenomenal acidity of Geisha, I prefer 1:13.



ACT THREE

ACT THREE. Present the beverage with the utmost elegance and surround your carefully prepared brew with the dignified grace of a fashion model traversing the catwalk. A serving of Geisha is not like the average cup of joe and great attention must be paid to the fine details of selecting the right demitasse for this final act. In our studio, we use ultra light, double-walled Bodum glasses with a wide, smooth brim which highlights the coffee's silky mouthfeel. In addition, I also like to use a 2.5 ounce tulip-shaped ceramic cup which I found for this purpose at an antique market in Antwerp, Belgium; it tends to accentuate the unique aromatic properties of Geisha coffee.

In a perfect world, the 'geisharista' performs a coffee ritual in three carefully choreographed acts which will levitate the customer's state of mind to a subliminal high. The experience can trigger the same sense of happiness as I've experienced myself so often and consequentially, the mesmerized customer may be speechless or utter 'Wow' as an ultimate sign of praise.



"We are on a mission to facilitate intensive, personalized learning experiences for coffee professionals around the world. Our work improves quality at every stage, from seed to cup."

WILLEM BOOT
Boot Coffee

BOOT COFFEE

