

the Collaborative

coffee source



Type of Coffee: Yirgacheffe
Variety: Yirgachefe Heirloom
Area: Gedeo
Town: Kochere
Altitude (masl): 1800-2100

About

Washed Yirgacheffe Kochere is a coffee from GEDEO, but from a smaller geographical area called Kochere. Kochere coffee is more acidic, with a bright acidity as the altitude is higher, and the most common variety there is Kurume, hence the coffee beans are smaller. Altitude is 1800-2100 metres as Kochere extends through a mountain.

This coffee is exported a “Yirgachefe” in accordance with the Ethiopian Commodities Exchange (ECX) classification system. Under this system, all the coffee produced within the large Yirgachefe area is called “Yirgacheffe Coffee”.

Washed Process

As coffee is pulped, the sugars remain on the bean and these sugars are then fermented in water in fermentation tanks for a period spanning 48-76 hours, depending on the heat and altitude from where the coffee is delivered. Once sugars are completely eliminated through the fermentation process the coffee moves under the sun for drying in parchment.

The acidity of washed Ethiopian coffees is much more pronounced due to the fact that the sugars have been removed from the coffee. In contrast to the natural process, where sweetness is key, one can more clearly perceive the acidity in these washed coffees.

Background

It being the birthplace of coffee, combined with notoriously changing the perceptions of coffee drinkers about what coffee *can taste like*, Ethiopian coffees court especially high expectations and attention year after year. Perhaps more than any other origin, coffee roasters look to Ethiopia to provide both stand-alone knockouts, as well as that *little something* to round out an espresso blend. Time and time again, the “Queen of Coffee Origins” delivers, despite a frankly labyrinthine and constantly evolving coffee auction and export system. Year after year, coffee buyers eagerly make their way through Addis Ababa and into the countryside, in search of the next fabled cup.

Ethiopian coffee is still made up of many wild growing coffee plants – most of them have not yet been classified, so the genetic diversity is innumerable and is still very much being studied and explored. While varieties do change from region to region within Ethiopia, you will often see “landraces” or “heirloom” listed as the varieties, even though this does not denote a homogenous genetic pool covering all of Ethiopia.

Being wild, these varieties have evolved naturally and so are well adapted to their surroundings. All this means that chemical inputs (fertilizers), pesticides, herbicides and fungicides are rarely needed/in use in Ethiopia; the majority of coffee produced is organic in the truest sense of the word.

Our washed coffees are carefully selected, rigorously sorted (by both machine and hand) and curated together with Heleanna Georgalis of Moplaco Trading Co. Heleanna and her team purchase coffees from the Ethiopia Commodities Exchange (ECX) and once the coffees arrive at their facility in Addis, they are meticulously sorted so that the full potential of each lot is clearly distinguishable. The current iteration of the ECX is structured in such a way that transparency (i.e. knowing the specific people involved with harvesting, and the place the coffee was grown and processed) is not available. Licensed exporters like Heleanna purchase coffees based on three criteria: broad geographic areas (e.g. Yirgacheffe, Sidamo), quality grade as determined by the ECX (e.g. Q1, Q2), and the lot’s date of

submission to the auction. Bidders are not allowed to see or taste the coffee prior to bidding. These realities are why the work of Heleanna's processing and export team is so fundamental to the quality of the coffee our roasters receive; it's why we consider Moplaco to be a "producer".

Important Terms & People within Ethiopian Coffee Production and Export

Garden coffee: coffee grown and harvested on smallholder property.

Semi-forest coffee: coffee that grows under a forest canopy. The land below the canopy belongs to a farmer who produces coffee in addition to other crops.

Forest coffee: coffee grown in forests protected by the Ethiopian government. People are given permission to harvest cherries. No people-induced cultivation is allowed.

Plantation coffee: coffee grown on privately owned commercial farms.

Smallholder: coffee farmers owning smaller plots of land.

Collector: a person that bought coffee cherries and in turn sold to suppliers (i.e. washing stations). In the current version of the ECX, there are no longer collectors.

Supplier: washing stations that are owned by a private person, or a cooperative. They deliver processed coffee to the ECX.

Exporter: can be a private person/company, a commercial farm, a union (usually supplied by cooperatives), or a government plantation. Commercial farms can only export their own production.

The ECX system: previous & new

The ECX auction system was established in 2008 and is a private company made up of private parties and the Ethiopian government. It was set up, ostensibly, to protect the rights of all parties involved, from sellers, to buyers, to intermediaries.

During its early iteration, smallholders sold their cherries to a collector, who bought cherries from throughout their area and in turn sold to suppliers/washing stations. Collectors had to obtain licenses in order to buy from their specific areas (e.g. Kochere), to which they had to strictly adhere.

Once processed by a washing station, coffee was delivered to the auction in Addis and were cupped and graded by the Coffee Liquoring Unity (CLU). Auctions occurred daily and exporters had the opportunity to see the

samples, which together with the coffee's region, is what they based their purchasing decisions on. In this early system, the name of the region (e.g. Yirgacheffe) as well as its specific locality (e.g. Kochere) and sub-locality (e.g. Chelelektu) were transparent. Also available was the name of the supplier/washing station. Notably, exporters did not have the opportunity to cup these samples; only look at the sample and see its lot info. This is in contrast with other auction systems, such as Kenya's (for example), where exporters routinely cup coffees they're interested in.

Once the auction ended, the trucks containing the lots were sent to the exporter's warehouse *within the same day*. This allowed for good quality control—trucks delivering coffee that did not match the sample could be sent back—and it allowed for price discovery via the knowledge about specific geographic origin and the exporter's knowledge of demand for the various regions. One downside and perhaps a subsequent reason that the ECX was changed is that certain suppliers and exporters would enter into prior agreements so that the supplier could end up withdrawing from a sale if the highest bidder was not the same person it entered into a pre-arrangement with.

In the newer version of the auction, which was implemented quite soon after the first version of the ECX, collectors were eliminated and centralized marketplaces were implemented. So now, rather than suppliers buying from collectors or specific smallholders, they buy from centralized markets: cherry prices are based on the "market price". One big effect of this change is that suppliers can no longer negotiate prices based on whose cherries they like better: they have to buy lots based on what's available at the market.

Once the coffee (in parchment for washed; hulled for natural) arrives at the specific auction allocated for that particular region (e.g. Dilla auction for Yirgacheffe region), it is cupped and graded by the ECX lab within the facility, each truck that contains specific lots from specific washing stations is given a number so that its identifying information is only known by the Ministry of Agriculture, and exporters purchase based on the region and ECX grade. For washed Yirgacheffe coffees, there is an additional identifier: type A are coffees that have the "Yirgacheffe flavour" and type B are coffees that do not have the "Yirgacheffe flavour". Washed and natural coffees have slightly different classifications.

About Moplaco

Yanni Georgalis established Moplaco in 1972 and was a third generation coffee exporter. Yanni was highly respected not only within Ethiopia but was well known and beloved by buyers of Ethiopian coffee around the world. He rightfully maintained a reputation for not only selling the highest quality coffee, but also for his integrity in all aspects of the business. Heleanna, Yianni's daughter, then comes from a long and established lineage of highly respected Ethiopian coffee exporters.

Heleanna is a courageous woman and has done an admirable job of continuing the legacy of her father's at Moplaco while also carving out her own version of it in the years since her father's passing. Under her leadership, Moplaco is constantly evolving to produce ever-increasing quality coffee in spite of the complexity and challenges continually present within Ethiopia's coffee production and auction systems. Born in East Harar Heleanna, as a young girl, was forced to flee her home in the face of civil war and so grew up and was educated in and around Europe, where she eventually established a successful career in finance. She neither imagined nor planned to find herself back in Ethiopia and working in the footsteps of her father within the world of specialty coffee.

After the sudden passing of her father in 2008, Heleanna was faced with a difficult crossroads: continue the legacy her father had meticulously built with almost no knowledge about the coffee business, or continue on the path she had created for herself within the world of finance. We are very glad and lucky she chose coffee. True to her personality and way of approaching new challenges, Heleanna completely immersed herself in learning about roasting, cupping, agronomy (including the latest research and practices in natural processing) and the niche markets of specialty coffee all around the world. Though she admits that these challenges were extremely daunting at times—and sometimes continues to be—Heleanna continues to trailblaze her way through specialty coffee and is consistently updating herself on the latest trends and experiments in agricultural and processing techniques, travelling around the world to meet with and discuss these developments with the best and brightest producers and coffee researchers.