



## **FINCA LA MULA - PANAMA**

Origin: Panama

Region: Chiriqui, Portrerillas Arriba

Location: Southern slopes of the Baru volcano

Varietals: Green and Bronze tip Geisha, Dwarf Geisha

Altitude: 5,575 to 5,906 feet (1700 to 1800 meter)

Harvest: January - May and more pickings throughout the year

Processing: Sundried Natural (80%) and Washed (20%)

### **History of the farm**

In 2004 I tasted Geisha coffee when the variety was first presented at a coffee tasting event in Panama. Shortly after my personal discovery of Geisha, I was approached by a fellow Panamanian coffee farmer - Graciano Cruz - who told me about a unique piece of land on the slopes of the dormant Baru Volcano. In 2006, I visited the land for the first time. The fantastic elevation of 1700 to 1800 meters and the beautiful view of the valley south of Boquete gave me enough reasons to turn a dream into reality. The land was renamed 'Finca La Mula' (I visited the farm first on a mule) and eventually we planted more than 6,000 coffee trees on the steep, wooded slopes of this new Geisha coffee farm. The planting of the Geisha babies was a true challenge for the team of fifteen Ngöbe-Buglé workers. Since the beginning of the 19th century, the Indian population has been indispensable for the existence of the Panamanian coffee culture. They perform all the essential farming tasks: from weed management to pruning and fertilizing the coffee trees, to picking the ripe coffee berries. The hardest work, planting, requires the most physical effort. In particular at La Mula. In the absence of a regular road, all coffee seedlings had to be hand carried and transported on foot through the trails winding through the forest.

### **Farm Description**

Finca La Mula is a small, quality-focused micro-farm owned by Willem Boot and managed by Kelly Hartmann of the multi-generational Hartmann coffee farming family. It was planted in 2007 by a group of 15 indigenous Ngöbe-Buglé coffee farm workers, who were students of the Escuela de Café. This school was founded by Panamanian coffee farmer Graciano Cruz, and he organized courses in coffee cultivation, harvesting, processing and cupping. The planting of Finca La Mula

was part of the curriculum of this school, and training focused on learning coffee farming techniques that would produce high- end coffee in a sustainable environment.

Finca La Mula is located on the southern slopes of the Baru volcano in the Chiriqui province of Panama, at an elevation of 5,575 to 5,906 feet. The farm consists of 5 hectares of land, four of them planted with roughly 6,000 Geisha varietal coffee trees. Within the Geisha varietal grown on the farm, three strains have been discovered including the Green and Bronze tip, as well as a spontaneous hybrid dwarf varietal. Two full-time employees live on the farm in environmentally friendly housing built by farm owner Boot. The housing materials offer a high level of comfort to the employees and protect against cold and moisture. Cooking is accomplished with an environmentally friendly Oneil oven that requires 80% less wood for burning, protects the employees against smoke inhalation and creates a naturally warm environment. A fifth of an acre of the farm is dedicated to growing beans and vegetables for the two employees living on the land. The soil composition of La Mula: volcanic, high in potassium and phosphorus. Extremely high in organic matter.

### **Sustainable Practices**

Finca La Mula is a micro- farm which employs sustainable farm practices that focus on using inputs at an absolute minimum. The environmental policies of the farm have banned the use of herbicides or insecticides. Fungicides are rarely used, and only when the farm has experienced an aggressive fungus attack. Fertilizers are applied strategically in order to maintain necessary plant nutrition in soil. The natural habitat of Finca La Mula is a unique high mountain, tropical forest environment. The owner of Finca La Mula has elected to develop the farm in full harmony with the natural environment. The farm is densely packed with primary and secondary old growth trees, a large population of mammals (including the occasional sighting of a jaguar) and a rich and varied insect life. Cloud forests attract at least two hundred species of migratory birds and provide natural shade throughout the year. This shade keeps the soil moist, reduces the average temperatures which leads to longer maturation for coffee cherries, and negates the need for irrigation. The soil is very high in organic matter and the farm is surrounded by untouched forest land. Finca La Mula has a conservation program regarding water that involves drawing it for local consumption from a nearby stream, and taking coffee to be processed at the nearby Finca Hartmann farm. Plastic and compostable waste are centrally collected on the farm, and taken to be recycled and disposed offsite. Trails are built throughout the farm, with the native, deep rooting 'mirto' tree to avoid soil erosion. Finca La Mula pays workers well above the Panamanian minimum wage and includes added premiums for health care and other social benefits. The two workers employed on the farm live year round on the property and are given food packages during the year for added health benefit. Health care is provided as needed.

This farm exemplifies the non-traditional philosophy of new generation coffee entrepreneurs to go vertical all the way down to the farm level in order to produce unparalleled coffee qualities. In the case of Finca La Mula, the owner offers his employees substantial more economic and personal benefits than in a traditional worker-farmer relationship.

## Processing styles

### Natural Process

In 2016, about 70% of the harvest was prepared using the natural processing style. The pristine environment of La Mula combined with the unique location justifies this technique which exposes an array of fruit notes and floral tones. After harvesting, the cherries are collected at La Mula and pre-dried on drying tables at the farm. Every day, the cherries are transported to the farm of the Hartmann family for the initiation of a precision-style drying process.



A lush Geisha tree full with berries



Berries almost ripe for picking



Kelly Hartmann (manager) assisting with the harvest

The Hartmanns have a wealth of experience preparing natural processed coffees. Their drying tables use a special grid on which the cherries are dried. For the necessary shade, the tables are covered by a concave shaped roof. Either ends

of the roof can be opened up for necessary air circulation. The drying tables resemble very much the concept of drying tunnels (also used for other products). The drying continues until a moisture percentage of 10.5% has been reached. This year, the drying took on average up to 32 days. This slow speed drying style appears to benefit the overall composition and complexity of the flavor profile of La Mula.

Natural - Tasting notes

Aromas of black currants, passion fruit, cacao and jasmine. Multi layered, lingering flavors of dried papaya, tea rose and jasmine infused caramel.



Drying tunnel with freshly harvested La Mula cherries



This is the type of drying tables we use



Special mesh for the surface of the drying tables

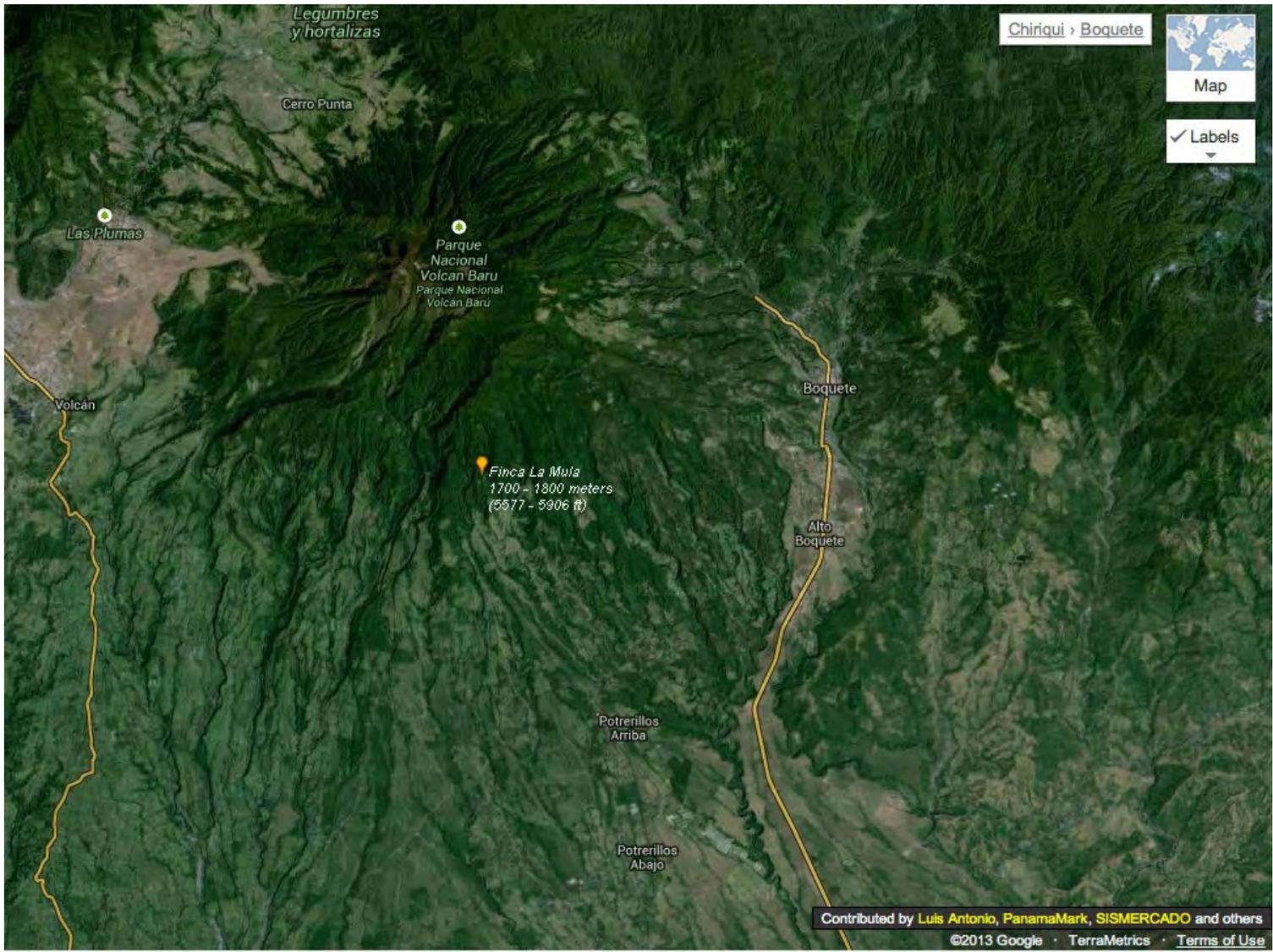
### Washed Process

In 2016, about 30% of the coffee was prepared using a special washed processing style. Before the pulping of cherries, we used a maceration process by soaking the cherries in slightly preheated water. After 12 hours, the cherries were pulped and cleaned through a demucilage process. The drying (using the same drying tables as for the naturals) took up to 17 days.

Because of the maceration of the cherries, we induced a mild form of fermentation, which created a slight fruity aftertaste, enhancing the unique flavor notes of the La Mula Geisha.

### Washed - Tasting notes

Aromas of rose, honeysuckle and currants. Sweet, lingering flavors of peach, blueberry, strawberry and mandarin. Rose and jasmine aftertaste with a nippy, fruity cherry note..



PICTURE 1 Location of Finca La Mula











