

Honduras Gesha

ATLAS
COLLECTION

Finca Santa Lucia, Comayagua, Honduras

 VARIETY: Gesha	 PROCESS: Washed	 HARVEST TIME: February-June	 FLOWER SEASON: April-July
		 WET MILLING: Cherries are depulped the same day they are picked, with the least amount of water possible, and then allowed to dry ferment in tiled tanks for 36-48 hours	
 ELEVATION: 1450-1900 MASL	 PRODUCED & ROASTED BY: Fincas Mierisch	 DRYING: Fully dried on raised beds for 12-14 days to 11% humidity. The parchment is moved an average of 3 times a day throughout the drying process.	 DRY MILLING: Dry milled, sorted, and bagged for export at third party facility Cadexa in San Pedro Sula

CUP SCORE:
90

PARTNER SINCE:
2013

The Atlas Collection seeks to highlight our coffee sourcing values—quality, ethics, collaboration, and integrity—which act as our tools for exploring the complex world of coffee. This gesha from the Mierisch family in Honduras perfectly embodies the value of integrity.

Our longstanding and deeply collaborative relationship with the Mierisch family has opened up a unique opportunity for us to present this exceptional coffee, a Gesha from their Santa Lucia farm in Honduras. This coffee was processed from cherry to bean entirely by the Mierisch family, meaning it was grown, processed, exported, imported, and roasted by the family—a first for our menu as roasters, and a result of the unique dynamics caused by a global pandemic. The cup profile offers layers of florals and tropical fruits with a complex sweetness. We taste jasmine, lime, white chocolate, papaya, and peach.

To understand the full value of this coffee, and how we are in a position to offer it this year, we have to take a small step back to share about the ACE, or the Alliance for Coffee Excellence, Cup of Excellence (COE) program. ACE is a nonprofit organization that began in 1999 in collaboration with



Finca Santa Lucia

the Specialty Coffee Association (SCA). Their founding mission was to create an equitable marketplace that recognized and rewarded coffee producers for hard-earned, quality lots. The founders of COE, George Howell and Susie Spindler, saw far too much inequity in the structures available to purchase coffee, and wanted to create nonpartisan channels to tip the scale, subvert the systems, and fairly compensate producers for their annual achievements. They believed their success could be measured in higher overall prices for coffee producers everywhere: if producers and coffee sellers knew what their coffees were worth they could define the narrative and take back some control when it came to price, and in doing so, could shift the unjust “buyer’s market” that has prevailed in coffee trading since the colonial powers put the self-serving infrastructure into place several centuries ago.

**Joe
Coffee**

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The coffee industry at that point, the deep breath before the 2000s, was just entering the “Third Wave,” in which consumer behaviors belied a growing fascination with complex flavor profiles and lighter roasts to better appreciate intricacies in the cup. Thus, at the same time as the COE addressed unfair wages and farmer exploitation, the industry also benefited from the opportunity to learn more about nuances of terroir and regional characteristics of particular countries through panels of international judges and a global auction system. In the two decades since, ACE has evolved to offer educational programs for producers and cuppers in every country where they work, and a highly reputable pathway for sensory professionals to join a community of judges with a diverse set of coffee backgrounds.



Clockwise from left:
A baby Gesha plant;
Ripe Gesha cherries;
Eleane Mierisch, Managing
Director, holding parchment
in the greenhouse for
raised beds

The Cup of Excellence program slowly grew to include more countries each year, though of course due to the vulnerable, and sometimes unstable, physical and political environments of coffee producing nations, the growth has been slow and steady. Now, 11 countries work with the COE program, and the Mierisch family was instrumental in the first year that the competition came to Nicaragua. Erwin Mierisch, Jr., Fincas Mierisch's *El Ingeniero*, participated in the first jury for COE in 2002, and both he and his sister Eleane, Managing Director at Fincas Mierisch, have since become Head Judges. As producers themselves, they now primarily participate in the international jury selections for other countries, but they've gained a reputation for their rigorous approach to sensorial analysis in their judging, and consistent, precise processing in all aspects of their work.

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The flow for each COE competition goes something like this:

The competition is rigorous, with cupping evaluations conducted over a three-stage process by industry experts: first by a National Jury of about a dozen qualified jurors from the origin country, and then by an International Jury, comprised of approximately 20-25 experienced jurors from around the world. A competition with 300 entries yields an average of 9,000 analyzed cups, with each “Top 10” coffee being cupped at least 120 times¹.



The Fincas Mierisch cupping lab in Honduras at Cerro Azul

The national and international juries are held in the host country each year, and ACE manages all stages up until sending out samples to folks for the final auction. This year, of course, the global pandemic thwarted plans to hold juries locally, and the ability to continue plans for the COE in each country became much more dependent on the policies enacted by local governments in order to ensure any alternative long-distance cupping measure could be safe and secure. To the detriment of many producers, the COE was cancelled in several countries because alternatives couldn't be found, and travel was extraordinarily constrained. Conditions to move forward with COE also depended on what stage

harvest was in, and Honduras was one such country that was unable to hold the COE since harvest was well underway when the public health emergency took hold there.

Throughout our long-time partnership with Fincas Mierisch in Nicaragua, we have purchased coffees from their farms every year since Joe Coffee began roasting coffee. A couple of years ago, however, the Mierisch family purchased three small farms in Honduras, and they have been working on improving quality and farm productivity there through active collaboration with their well-established teams in Nicaragua. They sent leaders from different roles from their farms and dry mill in Nicaragua to Honduras to contribute to the practices they would adopt there, including the head of their drying patios in Nicaragua, Toñita Ruiz. And they invited individuals from Honduras to spend time at their dry mill in Nicaragua so that they could create a new set of practices in Honduras that was built on their own expertise but also accounted for the natural conditions of Honduras.

When speaking with Erwin Mierisch III, who manages client relations and works in the Nicaragua QC Lab, he noted that they adapted their techniques for fermentation in their washed process coffees—in Honduras they have to utilize a dry fermentation because of the colder weather. He says if they used water, it would take a long time to properly loosen the mucilage surrounding the parchment, but with a dry fermentation the time it takes is closer to 36-48 hours, which makes it much more feasible.

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1. <https://cupofexcellence.org/cup-of-excellence/>

Similarly, another big difference from the way they process coffees in Nicaragua is the humidity level they dry the coffees to in Honduras. In Nicaragua they aim for 12.5% or under, but in Honduras they aim for 11% due to the colder temps and higher humidity—if they dry the coffee to a higher humidity level it runs the risk of mold growth or even being over the permitted limit for export.

Last year, after several years of working in Honduras, the Mierisch family submitted a lot of a Gesha variety to the COE competition in Honduras and won first place. The lot won a high average score of 94 points, and they were awarded recognition for their work at the producer level but also for their contributions to an organization that has prioritized the agency of farmers for over 20 years. They started working on the lots they were hoping to submit to this year's competition, but for a grower this means starting many, many months before the harvest and QC processes can begin, so when they were unable to submit an entry because the COE was canceled in Honduras, they began to look for other avenues to market their coffees. They approached us to ask about a collaboration.

In order to highlight their work and expertise, and also to honor the mission of the COE to provide producers with pathways toward a higher level of agency, we are bringing this lot of a Gesha from their Santa Lucia farm in Honduras to you all, but the Mierisch family owns the entire supply and value stream for it. They grew the coffee in Honduras, they processed the coffee from cherry to bean, they organized logistics to export and import it here to NYC, and they roasted it at Pulley Collective in Red Hook, Brooklyn (where we roasted up until last fall).

This, to us, is the full picture of a coffee, and it is a radical effort to showcase the complex skill set of the Mierisch family, and our deep gratitude for the honesty and collaboration we encounter in our relationship with them year after year. This year we were also constrained by the same global pandemic, and we were not able to be as strong of a business partner to them in our usual purchasing patterns. The collaboration to present this coffee, and another set of coffees that we will be sharing with you this holiday season, speaks to our work to continue to find creative ways to grow together this year, and take a step back in order to afford them as much value as possible since they are uniquely responsible for the quality in this cup.

From the Mierisches: this lot begins with harvesting optimally ripe cherries, no exception. Cherries are taken to Santa Lucia, the farm that hosts the wet mill for all Honduras operations, and depulped the same day they are picked, with the least amount of water possible. They are then allowed to dry ferment for 36-48 hours until the mucilage is loosened. It is then washed and moved to a greenhouse with raised beds where all their micro-lots are dried. The parchment is moved an average of 3 times a day. It's very common to use guardiolas or mechanical dryers in Honduras due to the colder temperatures and higher humidity found in the growing regions of the country, but Fincas Mierisch operates 100% sun drying just like in Nicaragua. Our drying times are the same as in Nicaragua, washed processed coffees usually take 12-14 days. Fincas Mierisch dries the coffee to its optimum humidity level, and each lot is cupped. Once there are contracts for the coffee, it is transported to San Pedro Sula where it is milled, sorted, and bagged for export. Cadexa, where it is milled, is also where the containers are loaded and taken to the main port of Cortes.