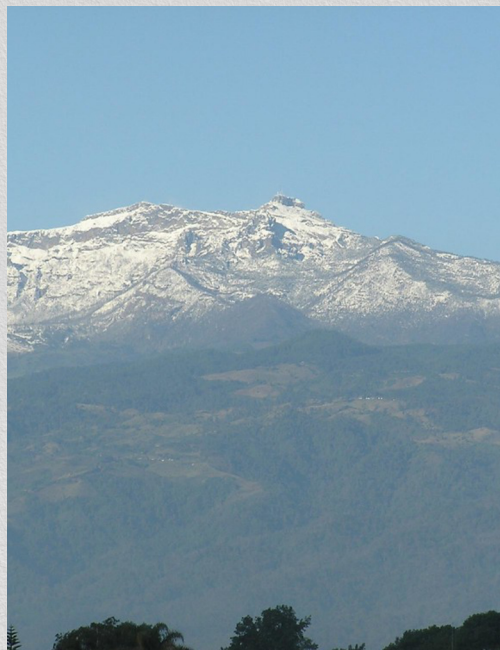
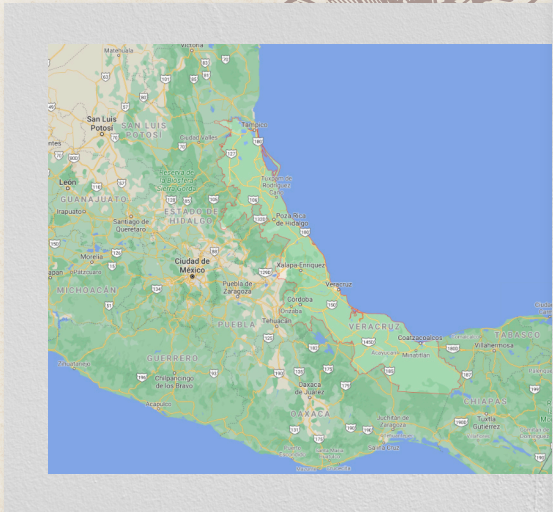


ENSAMBLES IN VERACRUZ, MÉXICO

THE VERACRUZ REVIVAL: A NEW GENERATION RE-INVESTING IN ABANDONED FARMS IN COATEPEC, VERACRUZ



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HISTORY AND CONTEXT

Veracruz is the state in which coffee was first introduced in Mexico back in the 18th century. Initially planted with typica, coffee was able to thrive in this region for decades due to its special climate conditions.

Veracruz is located between the Gulf of Mexico and the Cofre de Perote National park, a mountain and volcano range peaking at 4,282 masl. The currents from the gulf reach the Cofre de Perote, which retains a lot of humidity and gives Veracruz a very special climate, ideal for biodiversity and coffee cultivation under shade.

The region is known for its long days of mist and cold temperatures, which allows slow maturation of the fruits and high potential for coffee quality.



In the 1980s, Veracruz was the first coffee producing state of the country, at the time when coffee was the country's main agricultural export. Most wet and dry mills were built in Veracruz to process coffee from all over the country, due to its proximity to the port. Unfortunately, historic price declines and withdrawal of government support for coffee cultivation led to an abandoning of many coffee farms and mills.

At Ensamble we partner with a young generation of coffee producers who want to revive coffee and pay tribute to their grandparents, while embracing new technologies to access new markets.



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THE PROJECT

We focus on the Coatepec area, in the center of Veracruz, because it is historically renowned for its cold climate and high cup quality.

The town of Coatepec used to be the main coffee hub in Mexico, boasting today a deep coffee heritage. Some farms, like Finca San Alfonso used to be the superstars of quality coffee back in the 80s selling mostly to Asia.

Our main partner is Ernesto Perez, a 3rd generation coffee farmer. Ernesto's farm, Finca Fatima, was originally purchased by his grandfather. The farm is one of the highest in the region, at 1,250 masl. It may seem low compared to other latin american countries but considering the latitude and micro-climate of the reason, the coffee quality is extraordinary. In fact, when Ernesto Perez's grandfather originally purchased Finca Fatima, the land was considered high risk, due to frequent frost.

Ernesto has decided to invest in his farm by fully renovating it with new plants, diversifying varietals, and maintaining a shade environment. He knows that this will play an important role in carbon sequestration and soil preservation, making his farm a reservoir of biodiversity. Ernesto also wanted to add his personal touch to the project, and invested in Q- grading and Q-processing certification in order to give the coffee a standardized post-harvest process that results in quality and repeatability.

This interest in processing from Ernesto is likely owed to the fact that his family used to have a coffee equipment business back in the 60s.

Orchids and coffee, the two main symbols of Coatepec



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THE PROCESS

Shortly after getting Q-certified, Ernesto started speaking with other young coffee producers of the region who share the same enthusiasm as him for reviving specialty coffee in the area of Coatepec. Since many farms do not typically have a wet mill - most coffee used to be sold as cherries to huge national mills - Ernesto offered to partner with these coffee producers to provide high quality post-harvest processing. Today, Ernesto works with 6 different producers from Coatepec, and we also partner with them to access a market that values a differentiated product.

The three farms we will represent this year are firstly, Finca Fatima of Ernesto Perez, the leader of this project; and two farms of the Martinez family: San Alfonso (1,200 masl) and La Estanzuela (1,050 masl).

All cherries brought to Ernesto's mill go through a standardized quality control and washed process:

First picking is classified in one of the three categories: AA for great cherry selection with < 5% unripe/overripe, A for good cherry selection with <15% unripe/overripe and B for "conventional picking". Only A+ categories allow for a price bonus to the producer.

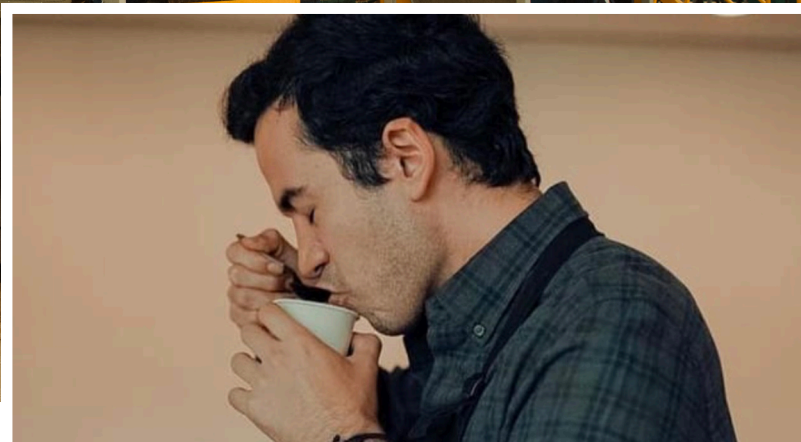
Then cherries are washed off and make their way through a density sorter in order to get rid of low-density cherries. After depulping, the beans fall into the tanks for a 48-hour natural aerobic fermentation.

Finally, coffee is fully washed and dried in mechanical driers - whose temperature never exceeds 40 degrees - which allows for a slow and technology-friendly drying. Each lot is processed separately.

It is worth mentioning that this post-harvest process and lot separation protocol is much more meticulous and qualitative than in most mills of Veracruz, where the use of mechanical demucilagers and 80-degree driers is widely common.

After the coffee is dried, Ernesto - who is also a Q grader - personally cups each lot he processes, in order to evaluate quality and decide which market the coffee will be destined for. Ensamble joins forces with Ernesto at this step to look for a market for all coffees, either nationally or internationally. We share the risk of buying coffees without a client because we know how great the coffees are.

Ernesto processes some honey and naturally processed coffees too! Dried on raised beds for 20 to 30 days, one of Ernesto's natural typicas is currently in the last round at the Cup of Excellence Mexico 2021! Together with Ensamble, whose founder also owns a biodynamic farm in Coatepec, we share knowledge, success and failures in relation to coffee quality of the region while maintaining healthy ecosystems. Who wants to join us in this venture?



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