Specialty Coffee: From Seed to Cup

History, plant, processing, roasting and cupping of specialty coffee - Free sample (Chapter 1)



Luis Felipe Ariza Vesga

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To the coffee-growing families of Colombia who tend every cherry by hand, and to everyone who has shared a cup with us at Beantage Specialty Coffee Roasters.

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Conventions Used in This Book

The typographic conventions, units of measurement, and callout boxes, including a home-roasting safety note, used throughout this book.

Overview

The following typographic conventions, units of measurement, and four types of callout boxes are used throughout this book. This section is for reference: you do not need to memorize it before starting, but it is worth returning to if a symbol or unit is unclear later on.

The conventions cover five categories: typography, units of measurement, callout boxes, figures, and the book's language and cross-references. Each category is explained with a real example drawn from the chapters themselves, not an invented one, so you see exactly how it looks applied before you encounter it in context.

If you prefer to learn by reading straight through rather than consulting a reference table, you can skip this section for now: every convention is briefly reintroduced the first time it appears in a chapter, so none of what follows is strictly required before you start reading.

Typography

Bold Indicates key terms and important concepts on first use, such as **natural process** or **roast development point**.

Italic Used for scientific names and foreign-language terms, such as *Coffea arabica*, *Coffea canephora*, or the French *terroir*.

`Constant width` Used for brewing ratios, recipe numeric values, and the values used in the lab practices, such as `1:18` or `92 °C`.

Footnotes mark a cited source or a clarification that would interrupt a paragraph's flow if it were folded into the body text.

When a brewing recipe appears inside a paragraph rather than in a list, the method's name (for example, V60 or French press) is always set in **bold** the first time it is mentioned in a chapter, so you can spot it at a glance if you come back to that page later.

Spanish terms that come directly from coffee's technical English, such as *espresso* or *cupping*, keep their italics the first time they appear, even where they are already in common use among Spanish-speaking baristas.

Units and measurements

Temperatures are given in degrees Celsius (°C). Growing altitude is given in meters above sea level (masl); Colombian sources write the same unit as msnm. Brewing ratios are written as coffee:water, for example `1:18`, meaning 1 gram of ground coffee for every 18 grams of water (about 55 g of coffee per liter). Weight is always given in grams (g), never cups or tablespoons, because a cup of ground coffee weighs a different amount depending on grind size and variety. Extraction times are given in minutes and seconds (for example, 2:30).

When a cited source uses a different unit (for example, feet instead of meters, or Fahrenheit instead of Celsius), this book converts it and notes the conversion in parentheses the first time it appears, so you are never left doing the math mid-read.

Callout boxes

Four callout types signal information of special importance throughout the book.

Note boxes contain additional context that supplements the main text.

> **Note**
> This is what a real Note box looks like: Specialty Coffee Association (SCA) standards and protocols are revised periodically; this book reflects the version current at the time of writing, but for the latest official protocol always check sca.coffee.

Tip boxes contain a practical bar or roastery trick that saves time or improves a result.

> **Tip**
> This is what a real Tip box looks like: always weigh ground coffee and water in grams, never in spoonfuls; a difference of a single gram in a `1:18` ratio changes extraction noticeably in the cup.

Warning boxes contain information you should not overlook, even when it carries no immediate physical risk.

> **Warning**
> This is what a real Warning box looks like: a poorly dried natural-process coffee can over-ferment and develop irreversible flavor defects; Chapter 8 explains how to spot them before buying or roasting the lot.

Caution boxes flag a real physical risk: burns from hot water, hot air from a home roaster, or the smoke and embers the chaff can produce during roasting.

> **Caution**
> This is what a real Caution box looks like: if you roast coffee at home with a hot-air roaster or a modified popcorn popper, always work in a ventilated space, keep a fire extinguisher nearby, and never leave the roaster unattended: the chaff the bean sheds is flammable, and the drum reaches temperatures that burn skin on contact.

Figures

Figures are numbered by chapter and by figure index within the chapter, and the caption appears below the figure. Where a figure is a Mermaid diagram (for example, the coffee processing timeline or the map of Colombia's coffee-growing regions), it

renders live in the web reader and as a rasterized diagram in the PDF. Where it is an image (an illustration of the cherry, the plant, a roast profile, or a cupping cup), the file lives in `images/<chapter-id>/` and always carries a visible credit line when it comes from an official or third-party copyrighted source.

Every image in this book is a watercolor-style illustration created for this work; none is a photograph. They depict the farm, the roastery, and the cupping cups the chapters describe, but they are artistic interpretations, not records of a specific place or piece of equipment.

Language and cross-references

This book is published as two separate editions, one in Spanish and one in English, each with its own title. You are holding the English edition; every chapter was first researched and written in Spanish. Cross-references in the text, such as "Chapter 8" or a figure number, always point to chapters and figures in this same edition.

If you cite this book or compare the two editions, note that some technical terms (such as *body* in English versus "cuerpo" in Spanish for a cup's mouthfeel) were translated carefully to preserve the exact sensory meaning, not the most literal translation.

Preface

Why an engineer, coffee farmer, and SCA-certified taster wrote this book, who it is for, what you need, and how to navigate its five parts.

Why this book exists

Since February 2024, when Beantage Specialty Coffee Roasters began operating, I have led walking tours and private coffee workshops in Bogotá, and I have watched the same scene play out dozens of times: a group finishes a cupping, someone tastes a natural-process coffee bursting with blackberry for the first time, asks how the same plant can taste so different depending on how the cherry was processed, and the tour ends before the full answer fits into the conversation. This book grew out of those questions left half-answered at the door of a coffee shop.

I am an engineer, and I am also a coffee farmer, testing new cultivars such as geisha, tabi, pink bourbon and papayo at 1,550 meters above sea level, as well as a roaster, barista, and a taster certified by the Specialty Coffee Association (SCA). That unusual combination taught me to hold coffee to the same rigor I hold any technical system to: understand every link in the chain, from seed to cup, instead of memorizing scattered marketing phrases. I wrote this book to gather, in one place and in accessible language, what usually only comes together in fragments spread across several visits to the farm, the roastery, and the bar.

> **Note**
> At cuppings someone always asks whether a natural coffee tastes of blackberry because blackberry plants grow beside the coffee trees, or of lemon or orange because citrus grows nearby. It is false: fruity notes come from the variety, the terroir and, above all, from the esters that yeasts produce during post-harvest fermentation (Pajuelo-Muñoz et al., Molecules, 2026), not from flavor passing between neighboring plants. Honey is the opposite case, and for a concrete reason: bees do carry a plant's nectar back to the hive, which is why monofloral honeys such as orange blossom or coffee blossom exist, with an aroma that matches their botanical origin (FAO Codex Alimentarius honey standard; Trinh et al., Foods, 2022).

Who this book is for

This book is for the coffee lover who wants to understand what they are drinking, no prior knowledge required. It is written with Beantage's Bogotá tour and private workshop guests specifically in mind, whether they want to go deeper before or after the experience, but it works just as well for any reader who found this book on their own: the beginning barista, the curious traveler, the person who simply wants to stop drinking bad coffee at home.

It does not assume the reader knows what a washed process is or how a roller mill works. Every technical term is explained the first time it appears, and the chapters move from coffee's origin toward the cup in the same order a beginner needs to learn them.

It does not matter either if you have never been to Bogotá: the vocabulary and cupping protocol this book teaches are the same ones any SCA-certified taster uses anywhere in the world, so they work just as well for understanding a bag of Colombian coffee bought on another continent.

What you need for this book

For the labs you need a burr grinder (conical or flat, ideally with metal burrs rather than ceramic), a kitchen scale, a kettle, a stove, a French press, and a timer. The grinder and the scale are standard equipment, not optional: the labs dose in grams

and are done in front of the coffee, with no terminal, no computer, and no calculator. A thermometer is optional. You do not need professional laboratory equipment or prior barista experience: you need curiosity and a palate willing to pay attention.

If you work through the cupping labs (Part 5), a clean cup free of lingering flavors, some freshly roasted coffee, and the willingness to write down what you actually taste, rather than what you think you should taste, matter more than any additional equipment.

You also do not need to know anything about agronomy or roast chemistry before you start: each chapter introduces the technical concept you need right before you use it, in the same order it appears in the coffee chain, so you can read straight through without stopping to look up definitions elsewhere.

What this book is about

This book is about specialty coffee as a complete chain, not as a product that simply appears ready-made in a bag. It follows the seed from the *Coffea* plant, through its history and its arrival in Colombia, through cultivation, harvest, and processing that turn the cherry into green bean, into roasting, grinding, brewing methods, and finally the vocabulary and cupping protocol an SCA-certified taster uses to describe what is actually in the cup. The labs are not printed in the book: they live in the companion repository, one per part, and each chapter points to its topics in a "Practice in the lab" section. The book draws throughout on the real, lived experience of running a farm, a roastery, and coffee tours in Bogotá with Beantage Specialty Coffee Roasters.

It also explains, chapter by chapter, why each decision along the way (the variety planted, the drying method, the roast curve, the brewing ratio) changes what you ultimately taste in the cup.

The book is not a technical manual: it brings you the technical elements of specialty coffee in an easy way. Professional measurements exist (refractometers for TDS and extraction, Agtron for roast color, roast-profile software, and the SCA cupping forms), and the book mentions them so you know them. Its aim is that these ideas can be understood and practiced at home, in the kitchen, without professional laboratory equipment, using home equipment (grinder, scale, kettle, and French press), with no computer and no calculator.

What this book is not

This book is not an official Specialty Coffee Association certification manual, and it does not substitute for any of the SCA's accredited courses; where it cites SCA protocols or standards, it does so as an educational reference, not a credential. It is also not an exhaustive agronomy treatise: it describes what a coffee grower and taster needs to understand about cultivation, but it does not replace an agronomy engineering course or Cenicafé's technical guidance for someone already farming coffee. And above all, it does not replace tasting coffee: no book substitutes for the moment of smelling a freshly extracted cup and feeling for yourself the difference between a washed process and a natural one. If you can, pair this reading with a visit to a roastery or one of Beantage's tours in Bogotá.

It is also not a five-minute quick-recipe book for good coffee: quality in the cup starts on the farm, long before the coffee reaches your kitchen, and this book respects that order.

Navigating this book

The book is organized into five parts that follow the real order in which coffee becomes what reaches your cup: Origin and History, The Plant, From Farm to Green Bean, From Roast to Cup, and The Cupper's Palate. Each part groups three chapters and has one hands-on lab of 50 to 75 minutes in the companion repository, so the recommended reading order is linear: what you learn about the plant in Part 2 explains cultivation decisions in Part 3, and what you learn about roasting in Part 4 prepares you to describe precisely what you taste in the cupping labs of Part 5.

If you already have experience and are looking for quick reference, the Glossary (Appendix A) collects the technical terms, and the Beantage experience guide (Appendix B) summarizes the tours and workshops available in Bogotá for anyone who wants to experience in person what this book describes.

Using the recipes and ratios in this book

This book gathers brewing recipes, coffee-to-water ratios (for example, about 55 g of coffee per liter of water, roughly `1:18`), roast and extraction temperatures, and

lab practices to do in your kitchen; the full step-by-step of those practices lives in the companion online repository https://github.com/lfarizav/cafe-de-especialidad-de-la-semilla-a-la-taza. The repository has two folders, `es/` for the Spanish edition and `en/` for the English edition, and inside each one there is one lab per part, from `lab-part-01` to `lab-part-05`, with its materials, steps and logbook. Every one of those recipes was tested, either at Beantage's roastery and bar or in my own kitchen, before it was written into the book; none of it is theoretical. You may use any recipe, ratio, or method in this book at home or in your own business without asking permission, including the brewing recipes in the labs; a mention of this book is appreciated but not required. The one thing I ask is that if you reproduce a substantial portion of the text in another publication, you write to me first.

Keep in mind, though, that a ratio or temperature that works with my equipment and my altitude may need fine-tuning with yours: treat them as a reliable starting point, not an absolute rule.

How to contact me

Found an error, an outdated source, or do you just want to tell me what you learned? Write to me directly.

Email	beantagecoffeeroaster@gmail.com
Website	beantagecoffee.com
Tours and workshops	Beantage Specialty Coffee Roasters on Viator and Tripadvisor

Corrections are especially valuable for a book that teaches a living agricultural product: harvests, varieties, and even SCA standards change over time, so if something here has gone out of date, I want to know. A confirmed correction gets folded into the next revision and credited in the acknowledgments of that edition.

You can also write to me if you want to arrange one of Beantage's tours or private workshops in Bogotá directly, or if you simply want to share a photo of the first cup

you brewed following a recipe from this book; I love seeing those.

I answer every message personally, even if it sometimes takes a few days when I am deep in harvest season or at the roaster; no email goes unanswered.

Acknowledgments

This book would not exist without the coffee-growing families of Colombia who tend every cherry by hand, harvest after harvest, or without the Beantage Specialty Coffee Roasters team in Bogotá who keeps the roastery, the bar, and every tour running with the same care. Thank you to the Federación Nacional de Cafeteros and to Cenicafé for decades of public research on Colombian coffee, and to the global Specialty Coffee Association community for building a shared sensory language that any taster, in any country, can use to describe a cup.

Thank you, above all, to everyone who has taken one of our tours or workshops in Bogotá and left with a question we did not fully get to answer: those questions are where this book began.

Thanks also to my family, who has shared every harvest, every failed roast, and every cupping experiment of these years without ever once complaining about the smell of roasted coffee soaked into every room of the house.

PART I

Origin and History

1

The Discovery of Coffee: the Legend of Kaldi

Before it was ever a perfect cup, coffee was an Ethiopian legend about dancing goats, suspicious monks, and a wild shrub that remains, to this day, the genetic reserve of coffee's future.

1.1 Why every cup begins in Ethiopia

Every cup of coffee in existence begins long before the bean, the roast, or the barista: it begins in the highlands of Ethiopia, where the first wild shrubs of **Coffea arabica** grew under the forest canopy. Before farms, cooperatives, or cupping competitions existed, there was a legend: that of a goatherd who noticed something strange in his flock and, without knowing it, opened the door to one of the most consumed beverages on the planet. In this first chapter of the book we trace that origin, not as a quaint anecdote but as the real starting point of the genetics, culture, and trade that sustain specialty coffee today.

As a Colombian roaster and SCA-certified taster, I care about this story for a very concrete reason: understanding where the genetic diversity we still protect in every origin lot comes from. Ethiopia is not just the backdrop of a charming myth; it is the genetic bank on which much of coffee's future depends in the face of climate change. This chapter tells the legend of Kaldi, traces the earliest written mentions of coffee,

and explains why Ethiopia remains, centuries later, the genetic cradle of the species you drink every morning.

1.2 The Legend of Kaldi

The most widely cited legend about the discovery of coffee is set in the region we now know as Ethiopia, called Abyssinia in antiquity; sources disagree on the date (the National Coffee Association places it in the 9th century) and no text from the time supports it. The story goes that **Kaldi**, a young goatherd, spent most of his time playing the flute and composing verses while his flock grazed on its own, since tending the animals did not demand much effort. One day, when he called the goats with the special note he always used, none of them answered. Afraid of losing them and of being punished by his father, Kaldi went looking for them and found them jumping and ”dancing” in a way he had never seen before.

Looking closely, he noticed that the animals' agitation coincided with their eating red berries from a nearby shrub. Intrigued, he first tried the leaves, then the mucilage surrounding the seed, and finally chewed the seeds themselves: he felt the same stimulating effect his goats had shown. Days later he brought the berries to his father, who handed them over to the monks at a local monastery. The monks, convinced this was some trick of the devil, threw the seeds into the fire, but the aroma of the improvised roast seduced them immediately. To preserve them, they decided to roast, crush, and mix them with hot water: according to legend, this is how the first coffee infusion was born, one the monks adopted to stay awake during their night prayers.

Like any origin legend, Kaldi's story has no direct documentary support, but it condenses a pattern that repeats throughout coffee's real history: an accidental discovery, initial distrust, and a religious community that ends up adopting the drink for its practical usefulness. The National Coffee Association of the United States recounts it in its History of Coffee, National Coffee Association USA, 2026, and Mark Pendergrast tells it as well in his reference book on coffee's global history, *Uncommon Grounds*, Basic Books, 2019. The scene, with its leaping goats and curious herder, is the one illustrated in Figure 1.1.

There is a variant of this same legend worth telling, because it reveals something deeper than the folkloric detail of the dancing goats. As Colombian historian Diana



Figure 1.1. Kaldi watches his goats dance after eating berries from the wild coffee shrub.

Uribe recounts in her podcast Historia del Café I: El origen de una bebida universal, Diana Uribe FM, YouTube, not every version agrees on who received Kaldi's berries: some speak of Coptic monks, heirs to an ancient Ethiopian Christianity, and others of Sufis, the Islamic spiritual current that valued coffee as an aid for nightly prayer vigils. That discrepancy is not a narrative oversight: Ethiopia was, and remains, a crossroads of religions (Coptic Christianity, Judaism, and Sufism have coexisted there for centuries), and each community eventually came to claim the coffee legend as its own. What every variant shares is the underlying pattern that matters most to this book: a religious community adopting coffee for its practical usefulness, not for its flavor.

> **Tip**
> When a label, a catalog, or a farm guide tells you an origin story for coffee, ask it three questions: is there a dated text behind it, who wrote it, and which community tells it as its own? The legend of Kaldi fares poorly on the first question; the old medical mentions, though debated, at least have a text behind them.

1.3 Etymology and the earliest written mentions

Behind the legend lies a much firmer documentary trail. The name of coffee itself carries several possible origins: in Ethiopia it was known as **bunn**; the Arabic word **qahwa** (from which ”café” in Spanish and ”coffee” in English derive) originally meant ”wine” and was used for beverages that suppressed appetite or altered mood; another hypothesis links it to **Kaffa**, the coffee-producing region of Ethiopia, and a third to **quwwa**, ”strength” or ”power” in Arabic. This multiplicity of linguistic origins is no minor detail: it reflects how early and how scattered human contact with the plant was across different cultures of the Horn of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula.

The first documented medical mention comes from **Rhazes** (865-925), a Persian physician whom historians usually credit with mentioning a drink called *bunchum*. Some authors warn that this *bunchum* may not have been coffee, so it is better read as a clue than as proof. Around the year 1000, another Arab physician described a drink called ”bunnam,” believed to derive from a root, and credited it with medicinal properties: it strengthened the limbs, cleared the skin, removed bodily dampness, and gave off a pleasant aroma to whoever drank it. During the 14th and 15th centuries, coffee consumption and cultivation spread throughout Ethiopia, before the plant crossed the Red Sea into the Arabian Peninsula.

That crossing happened thanks to trade that already linked Ethiopians and Arabs, and the earliest evidence of coffee in Yemen points to the 15th century (World Coffee Research). A popular tradition links it to the 6th-century Ethiopian occupation of Yemen, but there is no documentary proof of that connection. The Arabs later continued cultivation in Yemen using irrigation systems near the mountains, and it was there that the name **qahwa** took hold, the word that would eventually give rise to ”coffee” in most Western languages, as summarized in Figure 1.2.



Figure 1.2. From the legend of Kaldi to the first plantations in Yemen.

> **Warning**
> The dates in this chapter (the Kaldi legend, Rhazes between 865 and 925, the Ethiopian occupation of Yemen in the 6th century, coffee in Yemen around the 15th century) come from different traditions and sources. Do not chain them into a single timeline: the 6th-century occupation is a tradition with no documentary proof, and Kaldi cannot explain when coffee reached Arabia.

1.4 Ethiopia, the genetic cradle of coffee

Beyond myth and philology, Ethiopia holds an irreplaceable place in coffee's history for a biological reason: it is the center of origin of **Coffea arabica**. In the mountain forests of southwestern Ethiopia, the species evolved in the wild over millennia, generating a genetic diversity that exists nowhere else on the planet. While most commercial varieties grown today in Latin America, East Africa, and Asia descend from a handful of historical introductions (mainly Typica and Bourbon), Ethiopia's wild coffee forests hold a much broader genetic reservoir, one still largely unexplored by commercial agriculture.

This difference is not merely academic. World Coffee Research has documented that

arabica as a species carries very little genetic diversity compared to other cultivated plants, which makes it especially vulnerable to pests, diseases such as coffee leaf rust, and climate change. According to the Coffea Arabica genetic diversity program, World Coffee Research, 2026, a small number of varieties capture most of the genetic diversity available in the species, and the germplasm collections that exist outside Ethiopia's forests, while valuable, remain far more limited than the wild diversity that still grows in Ethiopia today.

For anyone working in specialty coffee, this has a direct implication: every new rust-resistant variety, every cross bred to adapt the plant to higher temperatures, ultimately depends on genes that still exist, today, in those forests. Protecting Ethiopia's wild coffee is not a symbolic gesture toward the past; it is protecting the genetic future of the cup.

It is also worth pausing on why coffee wakes rather than dulls. Caffeine is no biochemical accident: it is a defense mechanism the plant developed over the course of its evolution. Concentrated in leaves and seeds, it is toxic or repellent to certain insects, while in moderate doses it attracts and stimulates others that benefit the plant; in humans, it blocks the adenosine receptors that produce drowsiness, which is why it produces alertness instead. It is, in other words, a piece of plant survival chemistry that we ended up borrowing to stay awake. As Diana Uribe notes in the first episode of her series on coffee's history, this Ethiopian genealogy tends to be erased from accounts that begin coffee's story at the moment Europeans started drinking it, as if an entire coffee culture had not already existed for centuries in the Horn of Africa before that.

Note

Genomic sequencing places the birth of Coffea arabica between about 350,000 and 610,000 years ago, when C. eugenioides and C. canephora hybridized naturally in the Ethiopian highlands, long before any human cultivation (Salojärvi et al., Nature Genetics, 2024). The same study confirms that cultivated arabica carries very low genetic diversity, which is why wild Ethiopian populations are so valuable for breeding.

1.5 Monks, wine, and beer: the beverages of the monasteries

The link between religion and drink in coffee's history is neither accidental nor unique to coffee. Across the centuries, monks have been quiet protagonists in the history of several fermented and stimulating beverages: wine in European monasteries, beer in Benedictine and Trappist abbeys, and, according to legend, coffee in Ethiopian monasteries. In all three cases the same pattern repeats: religious communities dedicated to patient observation of the land, willing to experiment for generations with cultivation, fermentation, or roasting methods until they found the optimal conditions for quality.

Medieval European monasteries perfected winemaking and brewing techniques because they needed safe beverages (water was not always reliable) and because long days of prayer, fasting, and manual labor demanded something that would sustain the body, and in coffee's case, sustain the night vigil as well. It is not hard to imagine why Ethiopian monks, if the legend holds any truth, would have enthusiastically adopted an infusion that let them stay awake through the night offices. That same logic, a functional drink before a pleasurable one, explains why coffee, like monastic wine and beer, began as a spiritual tool before becoming a social custom and, centuries later, the global industry we know today.

Modern specialty coffee, with its insistence on detail, terroir, and process, resembles the monk who adjusted his beer recipe step by step until he found the right formula.

1.6 Practice in the lab

Topics from practice `lab-part-01` (Part 1) for this chapter:

- Your bag's label and the dry and wet aroma.

1.7 Summary

This chapter traced coffee's origin back to its oldest starting point: the forests of Ethiopia. The legend of **Kaldi**, the goatherd whose flock grew agitated after eating berries from a wild shrub, remains the most popular narrative gateway into this history, recounted both by the National Coffee Association and by Mark Pendergrast in

Uncommon Grounds. Behind the myth, however, lies a real documentary trail: the Persian physician Rhazes (865-925) is credited with mentioning a drink called *bunchum*, though it is debated whether it was coffee, and around the year 1000 another Arabic medical text described the drink "bunnam" and its supposed curative properties. Over the centuries, coffee spread throughout Ethiopia before crossing the Red Sea into Yemen around the 15th century, where the name **qahwa** took hold.

Beyond the anecdote, this chapter pressed on a point central to anyone working in specialty coffee today: Ethiopia remains the genetic cradle of **Coffea arabica**. Ethiopia's wild forests hold a genetic diversity that commercial varieties, mostly descended from Typica and Bourbon, do not have, and which World Coffee Research identifies as key to the species' future resistance against pests and climate change. We also closed with the monastic thread: like wine and beer, coffee was born as a functional drink adopted by religious communities before it became a social custom and, later, a global industry.

In the chapters that follow we will continue that journey: from the Ethiopian forests to the coffee gardens of Yemen, from there to Europe, and finally to Latin America, where coffee found a new home and, in Colombia, a vocation for quality that remains alive today.

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