

How Panama's specialty coffee revolution began

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Summary

Price Peterson, founder of Hacienda La Esmeralda in Boquete, recounts how Panama's specialty coffee movement started, from the collapse of coffee quotas in 1989 to the founding of the Specialty Coffee Association of Panama in 1996, the first Best of Panama in 1997 and the Geisha breakthrough of 2004. Circulated via the News Boquete mailing list.

Full text (English)

Price Peterson, coffee producer and founder of Hacienda La Esmeralda, tells the story of how specialty coffee took root in Panama. He and his wife began attending Specialty Coffee Association of America events in 1988, where roasters spoke of floral aromas and citric acidity, qualities Panamanian growers had not thought about while chasing maximum yield at lowest cost. When the International Coffee Organization quota system collapsed in 1989, prices fell from about \$1.20–\$1.50 a pound to roughly 50 cents, pushing producers to seek a new path. Seven producers founded the Specialty Coffee Association of Panama, formally established in 1996, and held the first Best of Panama cupping in January 1997, with no auction and only bragging rights as the prize. The first BOP auction came in 2002, fetching \$2.25 a pound against a New York price of \$0.56. In 2004 his son Daniel tasted the first Geisha harvest from Hacienda La Esmeralda; so unusual it was nearly left out of the competition, it won easily and set an auction record of \$21.00 a pound. His daughter Rachel joined in 2005 and has been central to building awareness of the coffee worldwide. Peterson stresses that coffee is a family industry and that the market must be renewed every year through teamwork.