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Unidad 2, Almanaque

El café

Journey Of A Specialty Coffee Bean: From Cherry To Cup

[Female speaker:] This is Guatemala. The village of La Mesía in Huehuetenango lies in the valley, volcanoes dot the horizon – conditions here are ideal for producing coffee.

Inside these red cherries are coffee beans, and each one is hand-picked by workers who are at the very tip-top of the mountain. It’s over five thousand feet above sea level here; altitude is key to producing great beans.

Whole families work together; it’s the first of many, many steps to produce a cup of coffee. The farmers here think that if we can see all the faces and places and processes behind these beans, we may understand why a good cup of coffee costs a few bucks.

Here’s where all the back-breaking work begins. Each bag weighing about 150 pounds is carried down the hill to a weighing station, where all of the workers gather around each afternoon to see just how much they’ve made. They’re paid by the weight. The process of turning this bean into a cup of coffee has just begun.

The owner of the farm, Miguelina Villatoro, explains what happens next is the first of many steps to separate the best beans from the rest:

[Miguelina Villatoro:] “This is a good coffee. We have to take a very good care of this. Many, many steps.”

[Female speaker:] And it requires lots of water. These cherries are put through a mill to remove the red pulp. This is what the beans look like when they come out the other side.

Now, workers rake the coffee beans as they dry in the sun. So now are these beans ready for roasting? Not even close. They’ve got to be bagged up and weighed again, driven by truck to yet another mill in Guatemala City.

Here at the mill, Miguelina takes off her farmer hat and puts on her business hat. She’s negotiating here the price of milling her beans.

The Los Angeles port is the next stop, and from here, the beans are put on railcars and transported to Portland, Oregon, where roaster Mark Stell is waiting for them.

[Mark Stell:] “We’re loading Miguelina’s coffee into the loader. It’s gonna get loud… So we’ll turn the loader on…”

[Female speaker:] Stell forged a direct trade relationship with Miguelina about ten years ago, and now is the moment that we’ll see if this year’s beans live up to his expectations. Great coffee is largely about getting the right beans. Stell says these beans have pulled nice, subtle character from the soils of the Guatemalan Highlands.

[Mark Stell:] “Just a little bit of coffee in the spoon, you know, slurp it… [slurping sound]”

[Female speaker:] Is it light and bright with hints of caramel? This is what Miguelina’s coffee is known for.

[Mark Stell:] “It also makes me salivate a little bit on the sides of my tongue so that means I know there’s a sweetness characteristic to it.”

[Female speaker:] Within one day of roasting these beans, local cafés, such as the Rain or Shine Café, will start brewing it.

[Claire Teasdale:] “And for a 12-ounce cup we charge two dollars…”

[Female speaker:] Owner Claire Teasdale says there’s a lot that goes into a good cup of coffee.

[Claire Teasdale:] “If you know the story behind it and you know all of the work that goes into the coffee and… it makes the whole experience of enjoying the coffee a little bit better.

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