

Lot Building At Stumptown

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If you've spent any time around the sign shop or the roastery, you might have heard the term "building a lot" used in discussions about selecting green coffee. Lot building is one of the most important things we do at Stumptown. Generally, it is a way to separate green coffee we want to buy from green coffee we don't want. This process always happens at the cupping table and a lot can be created from the output of a single farm, a mill or washing station, a co-op, or a group of farms within the same region. Lot building by Stumptown helps the farmers understand in a direct way how specific variations in agricultural practice translate into better and worse tasting coffee. This allows motivated farmers to improve cup quality year after year.



For a coffee to make the cut and be purchased by Stumptown, it must score an 86 or better on our standard cupping score sheet, which is based on the standard Cup of Excellence cupping form. In this system, coffees are scored based on aroma, defects, cleanliness, sweetness, acidity, mouth-feel, flavor, aftertaste, balance, and overall quality. The top score is

100 (which is an ideal and rarely, if ever, achieved). Often, we demand even higher quality than an 86, but coffee shortages in Ethiopia, Guatemala, and Colombia this year mean we have to take just about everything that makes our minimum standard for now.

In order to build our lots of coffee we ask for as much crop separation as possible from the farmers. In the case of an individual farm we want to taste each varietal, each day's picking, and coffee from each geographic location on the farm separately. If possible we want to taste the peaberries separated out from the flats. If we are buying coffee from a regional washing station or mill we want to taste the production of the individual farms contributing to that mill. In each case, we buy the parts of the total coffee production that meet our standards and farmer is free to sell the rest of

the crop to someone else. Often, the coffee we choose not to buy is very good but not truly great, and the farmer or mill has no trouble selling that coffee to a larger roaster with less exacting standards. Finca El Injerto, for example, produces plenty of coffee we do not buy which is sold to other specialty roasters. Injerto is also a good example of separation within the production of a single farm. We buy Bourbon, Pacamara, and Maragogype as separate lots.

The Guatemalan coffees we have had on the menu lately show lot building at the mill or washing station level. The Semillero, Buena Vista, Puerta Verde, Bella Carmona, and Santa Cruz have all come to us through the Zeleya family of Antigua. All of these coffees are from small farms in the same region, have a similar mix of varieties, and are processed in one of the Zeleya's two mills. Most other roasters would



program work. In the case of a larger, estate-type farm like Injerto or Puente, the farmer gets region by region, picking by picking, varietal by varietal feedback on each part of his or her farm. The best farmers use this knowledge to improve their coffee year after year, bringing substandard areas up to par. They reinvest the premiums they make from their best coffee in things like better processing equipment, improved drying beds, and in some cases like Montes de Oro, land that sits at a higher altitude. When farmers choose not to separate their

put all of these coffees together into one large lot and call them "Guatemala Antigua." The Bella Carmona was a lot built of three small farms and each of the others represents a single farm. We chose to keep these coffees separated.

crops in such a way that quality can be differentiated and lots can be built, it often means the end of a relationship with Stumptown.

In the case of the Colombia coffees we buy through the Las Mingas program, we do the same kind of farm by farm separation, but in this case we do create a few larger regional blends like Jordan, Piramide, and Las Mingas using regionally associated coffees that make the 86 or higher cutoff. In addition we offer very small, particularly high-scoring microlots from individual farms.

Building a lot can involve tasting and grading hundreds of coffee samples. Each coffee must be sample roasted and cupped. Most small specialty coffee roasters buy lots that have been put together by outside importers. At Stumptown we do almost all of this work in-house and this is one of the things that makes Stumptown coffee unlike anything else.

Sometimes a lot is built by flavor profile as well as raw cupping score. This has been the case with some of the Ethiopian coffees we have offered. In these instances we might turn down coffees that score well enough but don't have the specific flavor characteristics we are looking for for a lot.

Lot building is a crucial part of what makes the whole direct trade

