

I would  
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fruitiest,  
funkiest,  
most  
fermented  
Canephora  
on the menu.



Mikolaj Pocięcha  
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## 2) Coffea Canephora

Discovered	1895
Origin	Congo Basin
Chromosomes	22
Time To Flower	10-11 months
Flowering	Irregular
Ripe Cherries	Remain on the tree
Yield	2300-4000 kg per ha
Root System	Shallow
Optimum Temperature	24-30 °C
Optimum Rainfall	2000-3000 mm
Optimum Altitude	0-800 masl
Coffee Leaf Rust	Resistant
Koleroga	Tolerant
Nematodes	Resistant
Tracheomycosis	Susceptible
Coffee Berry Disease	Resistant

Shape Of Bean	Oval
Caffeine Content	1.7-4.0%
Common Varieties	Robusta, Conilon, Napo Payamino, Pepon, Bukoba, BP, IF, SA, CxR, Apoata, S274, Nana, Old Paradina, Congesis, Laurentii <sup>1</sup>
Common Origins	Vietnam, Thailand, Laos, Uganda, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Brazil, Ecuador, India

That name leaves a deep tone of mixed feelings and divided opinions. It created a phenomenon hard for me to grasp fully. It's a coffee family that makes up around 40% of worldwide coffee production. From very early on, it was considered inferior in quality, especially taste, and contributed to lowering the costs of coffee production. Its stereotypical cup profile is deemed to taste simply,

<sup>1</sup> Uganda Coffee Development Authority, Coffee Quality Institute

like coffee. The most well-known fact about Canephora is that they tend to be bitter, earthy and, sometimes pungent, containing almost twice as much caffeine as Coffea Arabica. That, of course, doesn't sound all that appealing. The more people explored the high potential of Arabica in all its diversity, the less optimistic and open-minded they were as the quality of Canephora remained in the past. This mindset created problems for the unfortunate coffee family and people cultivating it.

I wasn't so keen to give Canephora a fair chance. Early in 2021, I read a lot about how climate change affects coffee production and what options there are. I also read about coffee origins excluded from the specialty coffee movement and the lack of initiatives to change that. More than a promise of extravagant cup qualities, these topics pushed me to reevaluate the issue. Around that time, I tried a coffee from

festivals. It's all invigorating. I can't begin to tell you how large of an impact specialty coffee had on me, directly and indirectly. A part of why I find Canephora so promising is because I don't want the adventure to end. Too often, I hear sentences in the tone of "This is how it's done", "This is the right way to do it", "This is how it's supposed to be". I crave a playground with no set rules - a playground with no parents telling the kid how to use a piece of equipment. We'll figure it out, don't worry. We'll have fun doing it too. Part of refusing to conform to the set structures is the freedom to do whatever. I want to take full advantage of that.

### 3) Sen no Rikyu

Let's talk about reform. Fine Grade Canephora not being available for a wider audience isn't only the result of its alleged flavour but available venues and their purpose. The coffee culture surrounding us in Europe limits itself to neatly designed spaces, elaborate sensory descriptors and almost scripted communication structures. All centered around Arabica. Days of somewhat gritty coffee houses that served as melting pots of ideas, debate and free expression seem to have passed. Instead, they have been replaced



with extravagant podiums that help to showcase carefully coordinated outfits and status. But, of course, you are welcome to do that there in exchange for buying beverages and merchandise. I may be one of the lucky few to have experienced the other side of that spectrum through Vice Coffee Inc., Unfiltered Coffee Co. and SUEHANG. That's probably why reality stings. These places were/are something scarce. Upon entering, it might not be clear whether it is a living room, cafe, lab, bar, or? They are all those things at various stages of the day. Still, one constant thing is delicious coffee, skilled baristas, and a feeling that the day might yet lead you somewhere.

Sen no Rikyu had some interesting thoughts that I think might benefit this topic. Rikyu was a practitioner of Zen Buddhism and, like many who followed this path, was also a traveling monk. He believed that clarity is achieved best not

by complex or critical thinking but by focusing on simple activities such as meditation, connecting with nature or drinking tea. One of his most considerable contributions was the reform of Chanoyu. This Japanese tea ceremony has its roots in the 9th century. People associated tea with spirituality and health benefits. His idea was to put the ceremony on a more profound philosophical path. Worried about Japan's focus turning towards money and aesthetics, he spread an alternative set of values: Wabi-Sabi. Wabi - satisfaction with simplicity and austerity. Sabi - appreciation of the imperfect. He used Chanoyu to promote the idea of Wabi-Sabi and thus started a peaceful reform. He began by scrapping the image of a modern tea house. At the time, they were often built to be conventionally beautiful and elaborate. Rikyu proposed that a tea house be minimized to 2 m<sup>2</sup>, with a path leading through secluded gardens and the entrance made

## 5) Tasting

As we get familiar with tasting Canephoras, it is beneficial to start doing that from a neutral place. That applies to the mindset, location, present company, and procedure itself. Our approach should be open to being surprised, our pallet to navigate a new territory and build a new sensory map. This activity requires focus and mindfulness. I can best concentrate on these things in a tidy and well-lit environment. The company present should reflect a similar attitude and not distract.

have simpler flavours than those with more emphasis on controlled fermentation. These observations put forward an interesting question. What exactly can we achieve through fermentation? While the answer might vary depending on the type of processing and indeed the kind of fermentation itself, it is worth exploring. As a cupper, you should pay close attention to that and hopefully share your observations with others and me. Many aspects make certain coffees stand out and gain a reputation. The idea I'm trying to put out there is that we don't know them yet. For now, we are purely observing and learning from mistakes and successes. Therefore, sensory evaluation and sharing of knowledge become a crucial part of the process that will significantly impact coffee culture and guide the producers and processing experts on the decisions they will make in the future.

## 6) Processing

We are at a stage in the evolution of the coffee industry where we are no longer happy with spontaneous wild fermentation. This is especially true for Canephora. To create an initiative for buyers to pay better prices, these beans need to be ahead of the game regarding their quality and flavour profiles. There is also evidence that controlled fermentation drastically improves the scores of these coffees on the cupping tables. Since Canephoras are naturally a little less sweet and less complex, enhancing their

and focus on educating yourself and others. Processing and fermentation specifically are there for the producers to improve or maintain quality based on their circumstances and not to satisfy the consumer's demands.<sup>5</sup>

## 7) Roasting

This is such a fun topic. It can be approached from many angles, yet they all reach the same conclusion. After cultivation, this is perhaps the most crucial process in determining the end result. Roasting Canephora, or any coffee, comes with much responsibility and, equally, many dilemmas. I will explain. As a roaster, the way people will taste a coffee is in your hands entirely. Not only that, but it may shape how a person will perceive an entire origin. Many are not aware of the craft and skill of coffee

roasting. The most straightforward assumption for a Vietnamese Robusta tasting terrible is that this is its natural state. Pretty fucked up, right? I think the most significant reform within Canephora is how we roast it. I am convinced of this since it has proved successful in the past. The third wave of the coffee movement shifted away from dark roasts. Instead, it embraced coffee's unique characteristics, which caused people to admire single-origin lots and the work around them. Our goal should be similar here. Only the process itself will face different challenges. First, we should discuss how Canephora has been roasted so far and why. Having established the reasons, we can move forward to looking into how to break it out of that cycle. This will be challenging in itself since we lack research and essential calibration among roasters in the industry. Lastly, we should question the influence the industry

expectations have on how we approach this topic.

Without exaggerating, the way we have experienced Canephora so far is disappointing. I have consumed high-end lots that I roasted myself for a while now. I fell out of touch with the alternative. I visited a cafe that serves Robusta (of unknown origin) in espresso-based drinks to check myself. I was a little shocked and immediately taken back by the overwhelming bitterness of the beverage that can be considered only as brave being consumed without any sugar. Sadly, that is Canephora's everyday reality. But why? I had mentioned before that this species was from the very beginning considered inferior in quality and contributed to lowering the costs of coffee production. In the 1800s, Clarence E. Bickford invented the early cupping procedure and, for the first time, established a system of grading coffees based on both their

Drum Pressure	140-170 PA
Air Temperature	200-230 °C
End Bean Temperature	196-198 °C
Development time	2 min to 2 min 30 sec (20-25 %)

## 8) Brewing

A lot of the information in this part of the book comes from my previous release, BREW published by SUEDHANG in 2022. I highly recommend getting your hands on a copy. It will be beneficial for anyone who does not yet grasp the concept of brewing filter coffee mindfully and wants to learn more. In the coming sections I will discuss the most significant aspects of brewing *Coffea Canephora*. It differs from Arabica in a variety of ways but most importantly (at least from the brewing perspective) in roasting and chemical

## Creating A New Approach

Now that we've looked over some of the essential variables in coffee brewing, it's time to put them into practice. I guess the most exciting part is what we will do next. I hope one day, someone will look back at this book and say, "Oh, how little we knew". Sooner the better if you ask me. As I mentioned before, brewing Canephora will differ from brewing Arabica. It would feel unjust to state that and walk away. Therefore I will attempt to give you some helpful advice on adjusting your routines.

We start with water. I think its makeup and temperature ranges have already been discussed in enough detail. We can work with such makeup and seemingly low temperatures because of how easy it is to extract available compounds and their nature. However, most Canephora varieties won't benefit from high-temperature brewing as

it will almost always result in a level of astringency.

The type of filter, when possible, should be of the slower kind. When working with something like Aero-Press, I would recommend a double filter. Because of the high extraction speed, it will often be easier to brew using a coarser grind. We can slow down the process by choosing an appropriate filter to maintain easy to work with timing. This will have other advantages too. The main one will be a cleaner cup. Canephora is often known for its heavy and rich body. While this is often a desirable quality, it can overshadow its other characteristics. Filtering out more oils and fines will be beneficial in this case. I wouldn't worry about over-extracting by lengthening the contact time with a slower filter. It won't be a problem if the pours are planned and executed correctly. The longer the water is in contact with coffee, the less

extracting power it has as it is becoming more and more saturated anyway.

As much as it is a personal thing, coffee ratios and TDS can and probably should be different when brewing Canephora. Considering the high caffeine content and ease of extraction, we can adjust. I prefer to use a slightly lower ratio of coffee to water than when I brew Arabica as a pour-over; 1:14. I also tend to prefer brews with lower TDS. Canephoras I have brewed so far tasted their best between 17% and 19% of extraction and 1.35 TDS. I want to avoid setting standards over the sweet spot of extraction in this area so you can make up your mind.

To maintain a smooth workflow, I recommend grinding about 20% coarser than you would Arabica. Grinding in such a way will make it easier to work with slower filters, water temperature above 90 °C and comfortable timing

between pours. I would recommend the same for immersion brewing.

Finally, it would be best if you freely played with the extraction stages of a pour-over. One of my favorite methods is a simple two-pour recipe. It highlights the fruity characteristics very efficiently while maintaining the sweetness and balance in harmony. This recipe uses a sizeable first pour to account for 50% of the final weight. Heavier bloom can be exciting as it will highlight the acidity that usually tends to be toned down in this species.



## How I Like To Brew

You need

- 1) Water: 60 ppm  
Bicarbonate: 33 ppm  
Magnesium: 17 ppm  
Calcium: 10 ppm
- 2) Pour-over kettle with temperature control, scales.
- 3) One or more of the brewers and filters used below.
- 4) Maybe some extra stuff for fun.

## Kalita Wave

Ah, who doesn't love a juicy pour-over? This is how I like to make mine: vibrant, acidic, light and with a high level of flavour transparency. You'll find this recipe perfect for that. It works well, especially with coffees processed using extended fermentation. Many small compounds are easy to extract but difficult to balance. In brewing and in life alike, complex things are best managed with a minimalist approach. When executing recipes like this one, it is important to do it with care. In order to allow the coffee its flavour expression, your technique and preparation need to reflect the intention.

Parameters

- 1) Coffee: 14 g.  
(coarse grind/22 clicks)
- 2) Water: 200 g, 94 °C.
- 3) Total brew time of 2 min 30 sec.

## Recipe

- 1) 2 scoops of coffee ground medium-course in your favorite mug (make sure it's not too big or you'll need more coffee!).
- 2) Pour in water off the boil and let sit for a couple of minutes.
- 3) Add milk and sugar to your liking and stir the surface gently.

## 9) Conversations With Friends

As the title suggests, this part of the book is dedicated to conversations with friends. I visited a pub once in County Sligo, Ireland, where I grew up. The sign on the wall read, "There are no strangers here. Only friends you haven't met". That reflects how I feel about people I have encountered on this journey and those I am yet to meet. This is also how I would like you to think of me and the coffee professionals I interviewed below. There are few things more inspiring to me than hearing stories. Since I was a

child, these are the things that made me curious and thirsty for new experiences. I could talk about Canephora and how much I believe in it for a while longer. Then again, what would be the point? At this stage, I think it is better to let others talk, let you judge for yourself and make this a collective experience. I intend to present multiple perspectives to you. In doing so, I hope you will see the things that unite individuals worldwide and why we all care for you to hear these truths.

Sahra  
Nguyen Coffee Supply

Sahra Nguyen is a person who I cannot imagine doing this project without. Her company Nguyen Coffee Supply is shifting the narrative of Vietnamese coffee and Canephora around the globe. She uses Vietnamese coffee as a broad social and cultural concept to make the world a better place. By reclaiming Vietnamese coffee and reintroducing it as a quality product she disrupted the industry and inspired a movement. Talking to Sahra has been somewhat surreal and a dream come through.

M Your company and your way of communication have been substantial in developing Canephora projects that I am involved with here in Germany. I am inspired not only by what you accomplished but what drove you to do it. In this book, I put emphasis on finding out where the value of coffee comes

from. Both for people involved in the production and for the end consumer. What value do you derive from running your company and what values do you hope to pass on to your customers?

S I am really excited and passionate about making the world a better place through the medium of coffee. I often think about how we can promote our values of diversity, inclusion, equity, cultural integrity and sustainability. That's a general framework of how we operate as a company. What's really powerful about our work is that we don't just apply these values to Vietnamese coffee. Of course, that's our anchor because I'm Vietnamese American, I have a direct relationship to Vietnam and my family is there. But really as we promote these values, it's like; how to truly be inclusive in the coffee community? How can we apply this to every origin and every

community? When we speak about diversity, we speak about it in all forms. Not just diversity when it comes to race, but also diversity of origin, variety, science, perspectives and ideas. That's what we really hope to bring to the coffee industry. I felt like for so long, the industry was moving in a very convergent way. Everyone was aspiring towards one conventional norm, one standard of excellence. When we operate from this place of convergence, we lose creativity and innovation and we miss the opportunity to be inclusive of other diverse ideas. So for us, it's all about diversity but really this idea of divergent thinking. How do we expand our minds and ideas in the conversation to be inclusive of things we may not have thought about. That's what I feel we truly do. So much of our work is rooted in Vietnam. Because Vietnam is the largest producer of Robusta and so Robusta is a big anchor for us as well. It's about shaking

up the industry to be more divergent, creative, innovative and to diversify our way of thinking, way of being, way of operating and then through that process, we get to be inclusive of all forms of ideas but more importantly, communities. Whether that's a community of coffee drinkers or coffee growers. For example, when it comes to being inclusive of coffee drinkers, for so long in the third wave of specialty coffee there was this excitement about scientific extraction (which was amazing for evolving the coffee industry). However, the idea of mastery led to a very elitist culture. A by-product of that was coffee shaming. All of a sudden we had coffee drinkers who were like "Oh, I'm not really a good coffee drinker. I don't know that much about scales and science." Wow, when did coffee become this way!? Coffee is so personal. It's subjective, each to each their own. Diversifying and being inclusive of coffee drinkers that way

is very important for our community as a collective. We want everyone to feel empowered and valid in their coffee experience. Whether that is instant coffee or a well-prepared, weighed out espresso. We shouldn't have shaming in coffee. That also relates to being inclusive of all coffee growers leading to the Arabica - Robusta hierarchy. These are the key values I promote from running the company and also what we live internally. Our team is super diverse. Our corporate team is made up of Asian Americans, we have a person from Nigeria, we have a white person from Tennessee, we have close to gender parity. Our production packing team is 100% women. Before, when it was just me and I used to work in a shared roasting facility, there was maybe one man of color but no woman of color. We try to live by the values of diversity and inclusion and this relates to the way we hire too. We leave room for no experience required, training

“I would like your fruitiest, funkier, most fermented Canephora on the menu.” is an insight into a narrative shifting view of specialty coffee. Told through stories and observations that question the very foundation of how we view Canephora and offer an alternative experience. An experience based on inclusivity, hope, social impact and curiosity.

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