

The following information about the work of producer Alirio Ortega was provided to Subtext by our importing partner, Shared Source.

ALIRIO MUÑOZ ORTEGA

Alirio and his wife Anayibe are members of the groups Los Guacharos, a group of friends and neighbors near Bruselas, Huila collectively working to transition away from synthetic chemical inputs in their farming, and towards a more active, biodynamic form of agriculture. This year, Alirio is working towards a goal of 50% organic agriculture. The members of the Los Guacharos group also work together to commercialize their coffee collectively, and the group has a strong sense of solidarity. Alirio is often the humorous life of the group! This pink bourbon is one of the first lots from his recently-planted pink bourbon trees. Alirio has worked hard to specialize in more adventurous varieties- he has 10,000 pink bourbon trees, 3,200 young ají bourbons, 6,000 caturra, 900 bourbon sidra, and 1,000 recently-planted caturra chirroso plants. He and Anayibe have intentionally left part of their farm as a protected natural bio-reserve as well.

PROCESSING

This coffee is a 100% pink bourbon lot. To process it, Alirio picks cherries as ripe as can be, and does an initial float in water to remove the over- and under-ripe cherries. From there, he leaves the cherries to start the initial fermentation process (we call this a "cherry ferment") in a plastic bag for 36-40 hours, depending on the weather he's careful to keep the bags with cherries especially cool during this initial fermentation period. From there, he de-pulps the coffee, and then ferments it for an additional 36-40 hours before washing it. To identify the best time to de-pulp the coffee, he takes some and places it in water to see if the mucilage of the sample washes off easily- he also says that he tastes it to see if the coffee has a prickly, bright taste to it. From there, his coffee is sun-dried for around 15 days, and then dried under shade cloth for 10 more days. Parchment coffee is stored in Grain Pro bags at home to ensure that humidity is stable at around 11%.

SOURCING

We met Alirio through the Los Guácharos group. Collectively, members of the association share technical know-how and sometimes market their coffee together to take advantage of large volume. They're a group of independent, quality-focused small producers in southern Huila (close to Pitalito). Collectively, they're converting to organic agriculture, making their own fertilizers and fungicides, installing complex water filtration systems that use gravity, stones and sand to remove all mucilage residues from waste water to not contaminate water systems. The members of the group have started the conversion to fully ecological and regenerative production, close to biodynamics. Many of them produce a brew (called Super Magro) made up of organic minerals and waste products, molasses, bone ash and manure (among other ingredients), fermented with microorganisms collected from virgin soils and used as a fertilizer and protectant from disease. The Super Magro is edible, effective, and it's a producer-driven grassroots approach to empower producers to increase soil health, reduce costs, and lessen their dependence on synthetic chemicals. Group members say that it can be scary to lessen their dependence on synthetic chemicals- they worry about lowered yields, and increased prevalence of pests and diseases, and we understand their concerns. We've supported Alirio and Los Guacharos with workshops on organic methods, and regular check-ins to measure success on his farm- he's been slowly adjusting his soil to be a bit better adapted for growing coffee specifically, adding calcium carbonate. He's also planning to plant more shade trees to better protect his soil, and to improve his waste water processing systems- there's always room for improvement. We have been working independently with the Guácharos for several years. They are forcefully self-determined. The group's power lies in their organization as an association, committed to improving all members' coffee, and cooperating to sell directly, without working with intermediaries. They have all voluntarily trained at the local agricultural college in specialty coffee production: everything from agronomy and accounting to roasting, cupping and latte art. They collectively pay for consultancy in organic agriculture, and have a strong sense of solidarity: regularly working on each other's farms spraying organic fertilizers. This year, we're proud to have bought more coffee from Los Guacharos than we ever have before.