



As a Coffee Industry veteran, Gary Try, has worked commercially in all aspects of coffee production, both within Australia and in the international coffee market.

Caffe Shangri-la

Nepal and a Hidden Valley – Somewhere

“The surrounding sky had cleared completely, and in the light of late afternoon there came to him a vision which, for the instant, snatched the remaining breath out of his lungs. Far away, at the very limit of distance, lay range upon range of snow peaks, festooned with glaciers and floating upon vast levels of cloud” – James Hilton, *Lost Horizons*, 1933 (prologue pg. 14).

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The above quote of 1933, could have been penned today, for the words aptly describe the magnificent view down across the valley, to the Plantec Estate coffee plantation, clinging to the opposite hillside.

An intense peacefulness is worn by the entire valley, like a vast hanging cloak that covers and protects it, from the harsh sounds of the outside world. Soft murmurings of the wind through the valley carry up the gentle sounds of bubbling waters from the river far below. A stream of the sweetest water runs off from melting snow from the Himalayan mountain ranges above. These snow-capped mountains, kissing the deep and intense blue sky, create the backdrop to the Plantec Estate. It appears as though it is all just hanging in fine air. An atmospheric wonder, for if you blink, it could all just disappear.

That essence, somehow, is deeply infused into every bean, each drop of golden creme, each satisfying slurp, affording a deep spiritual coffee experience, that only a very special ‘influence-of-place’ can bring to the cup.

That’s Shangri-la. That’s Plantec Estate in Nepal.

Your daily espresso, a valley in Nepal and the highlands of New Guinea, somehow do not seem to have an obvious

fit. Yet the story of how a plantation of this quality appeared in Nepal is all of the above and a lot more.

How lucky we are in the coffee industry to constantly benefit from the world’s most exciting ‘play-off’. A simple tree with red cherries, colliding with history, place, culture and obscure chance, that affords us each day, to be honoured by this incredible and highly rewarding outcome in our cup. The Plantec Estate is this obscure chance collision, in reality, delivering an outcome of amazing cup complexity.

Ujjal Rana, the owner of Plantec Estate, as a young man travelled in the highlands of Papua New Guinea, experiencing the production of plantation coffees. This experience formulated a profound effect on Ujjal, who decided that one day, he would own his own plantation back in Nepal.

On his return and after working within the air transport industry, Ujjal and his wife spent a year of research to locate the perfect geographic and climatic acreage for a Nepalese coffee plantation. Further years of research meant that they tested many coffee tree varieties, to find which option produced the best cup quality, when combined with their soil, altitude and microclimate.

Time and ardent research proved that the Cattura arabica varietal, from seeds imported from New Guinea was best suited. It adapted well to the terrain and produced

a complex cup, due to the natural mutation of the Cattura, in a most unique natural pristine environment.

The Plantec Estate is situated in a district known as Nuwakot, adjacent to the famous Trisuli river, which is permanently fed from the Ganesh Himal mountain range. This area, 75 km north of Kathmandu, is unusually frost-free and the plantation was cut out of non-volcanic virgin Himalayan soil at an altitude of 2200- 2400 feet above sea level. This elevation, along with ample pure water, a perfect climate and a local skilled agricultural work-force, presented the perfect mix of conditions for commercial coffee production.

It was extremely hard work cutting out a new plantation into this region. New agricultural and structural programs were not only labour intensive, but hugely expensive undertakings. Along with these challenges, Ujjal and his wife had to face fierce leopards, pesky monkeys who get into everything and Maoist insurgents within their local hilly terrain. Just outside their house, soon after starting the estate, they watched as a local leopard caught, took down and devoured a large buffalo, within metres of their front door. Certainly not the daily challenges that face the majority of the world’s coffee industry workers.

As a new plantation, Plantec Estate was able to be structured from the start,

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MT EVEREST SUPREME BEAN

Italian cuppers note – The Mt Everest Supreme bean presents a very consistent and singular structure with hints of cocoa, candied orange and sustained notes of ginger.

American cuppers note – Delicate floral notes that are almost tea-like and hints of jasmine. Use a light roast to maintain the delicate florals and avoid the second crack.

Swiss cuppers note – Great body, good acid balance, refined and presents a wonderful taste.

Japanese cuppers note – The Mt Everest Supreme is rare and exotic with mild acidity. Virgin Himalayan soils present exquisite flavours.

Australian cuppers note – This bean possesses outstanding natural sugars, only found in the rarefied air of Nepal. Light clean body with sweet vanilla overtones. It is extremely aromatic, particularly when prepared with filter and plunger coffee – an extremely rare coffee.

The story and location of Plantec Estate is rare and exotic in its own right. But once the Mt Everest Supreme bean is infused into the cup, it presents a combination of a complete outcome, from location and tree-to-cup, that few plantations can compete with.

And who said that Shangri-la doesn’t exist?

EXTENSIVE SHADE TREES ARE USED TO PROTECT THE DELICATE ARABICA TREES FROM CONSTANT SUN EXPOSURE. THIS PROVIDES CANOPY FOR LOCAL AND MIGRATORY BIRD SPECIES.

to represent and achieve the eco-friendly goals that Ujjal recognised should be the basis of their production. Firstly, with virgin mountain soil, Plantec Estate was able to apply organic production techniques from the start, later leading to its USDA Organic Certification. It uses 100% natural and local compost, which is another way Plantec supports the local farmers for revenue generation.

Extensive shade trees are used to protect the delicate arabica trees from constant sun exposure. This provides canopy for local and migratory bird species, which not only helps to lower destructive insect and pest numbers, but has shown that some lost local bird variety are now returning to the region. This approach further supports the organic focus of a clean and untainted production system. Along with the native bird-life, native land animals are returning to the valley as well. Ujjal acknowledges

that a balanced environment can also allow a commercial outcome to exist in harmony with nature. His plantation environmental management and local cultural support programs, have also gained the coveted UTZ Kapeh certification for Plantec Estate.

This estate also has considerable impact on the local inhabitants, where the region traditionally did not offer a lot of employment opportunities. The plantation employs a lot of women to create equal employment opportunities for female workers, in a country where the male dominates the employment choices. The local school is also supported from the plantation estate and Ujjal assists smaller coffee growers across Nepal, to become more commercial, for a potential future export market. He assists the farmers to unite into well-run Co-ops, to share production facilities and increase the quality and volume of Nepalese output.

Plantec Estate covers 100 acres of hilltop and undulating land towards the river. All production and processing to market-ready status is carried out on site. Cherry picking is by hand, sorting is also manual and processing and washing pulped beans is supported by the use of the glacial fed waters of the Trisuli river. Post processing and drying also includes hand sorting, to produce an internationally graded finished bean for export markets.

International acclaim for the Plantec Estate ‘Mt Everest Supreme’ bean has raised global awareness and off-take, to the point that there is just not enough to meet demands. Nepal produces 200 tonnes of coffee per year, where 75% of this comes from the Plantec Estate. Luckily, supply of the Mt Everest Supreme is available in Australia to our roasting fraternity and for the enjoyment of their clients, from green bean trader Cofi-com Trading.