

# Finca Kilimanjaro Microlot

*Santa Ana, El Salvador*

The story of Aida Battle's first year managing her family's coffee farms has passed into coffee industry legend. That year, the young, relatively inexperienced, quality-driven Aida pulled an amazing hat trick: coffees from her farms took an unprecedented TWO awards in that year's Cup of Excellence, including first place. At the auction, that first place coffee set records, fetching a then-unheard of high price. That year, that coffee set the coffee world on fire, it was so unusual and delicious. It was the first rock star coffee. The farm was Finca Kilimanjaro.



I remember tasting Finca Kilimanjaro coffee for the first time like it was yesterday. I was blind-tasting the Cup of Excellence winning coffees in Counter Culture's cupping room in preparation for the auction. One coffee in particular stood out. At first, I thought there might have been a mix up in the roasting room, since this particular coffee tasted more African than Central American. It had the deep, blackcurrant fruit and beautiful acidity of a Kenyan coffee, layered over the sweet butter-caramel notes that typify Salvadoran coffees. It was a sort of Afro-Latino hybrid taste, heavy on the Afro and amazingly unusual and delicious. I was captivated and curious. Just after the cupping, I was called to the phone – a coffee roaster friend was wondering if I'd like to collaborate at the auction. I mentioned the curious African-tasting coffee, and he said, "Yeah. The Kilimanjaro. I heard it's planted with Kenyas."

I was astounded. In coffee-speak, my friend was telling me this farm, on the slopes of a volcano in El Salvador, had been planted with trees imported from Kenya, perhaps even of the legendary SL-28 variety. This was thrilling – I had never even *heard* of a farm in Latin America which grew any of the Kenyan varieties. And, since conventional wisdom said that the microclimate and soil are more important to coffee flavor than varietal, I was shocked that I could actually *taste* the Kenya-ness of the varietal. This experience changed the way I, and many other coffee tasters, thought about the importance of varietal in coffee quality. As I mentioned before, that coffee was by far the most hotly contested auction lot in history up to that time, and the winning bidder was the famous, quality-driven Solberg and Hansen coffee roasting company of Norway.



Later that year, while I was visiting El Salvador as a volunteer instructor, Aida Batlle marched into the office I was using and began to quiz me on African coffee drying techniques. We became fast friends, and before long she had agreed to sell us coffee from another of her farms, nearby Finca Kilimanjaro, the now-famous Finca Mauritania. Finca Mauritania, though extraordinarily delicious, is planted with the heirloom Bourbon coffee strain, not the rare and mysterious “Kenyas” of Finca Kilimanjaro.



Over the years, I’ve visited Finca Kilimanjaro and learned a little about the mysterious coffees planted there. Apparently at some time in the ‘40s or ‘50s, Kenyan varieties were planted on a particular slope of the Santa Ana volcano as an experiment. Many of the trees still grow there, and that part of the volcano has been subdivided into a number of farms, including the farm Aida’s father renamed Finca Kilimanjaro. It’s high up, near the top of the volcano, way over 5000 feet in altitude (not unlike Nyeri, Kenya). Nobody has yet determined the specific varietal equivalent in Kenya, but the large, oval coffee cherries that grow on the trees there are unmistakably distinct. This is really a one-of-a-kind coffee, from an absolutely unique place. There is no other place I know of that grows coffees even remotely similar to Finca Kilimanjaro. About 70% of the “Kenya” varietal remains on the farm, the other 30% being the classic Salvadoran Bourbon varietal.

Aida believes in partnership and commitment, and she has sold Finca Kilimanjaro’s coffee to Solberg and Hansen every year since that first one. She’s never re-entered her coffee in the Cup of Excellence (you gotta give others a chance to win too, right?). However, Aida has occasionally reserved a few bags for certain special coffee roasters who just **MUST** have a little bit, and she’s always had a few bags for us to roast and share with our customers. I’m grateful and honored to roast this very special microlot from Finca Kilimanjaro.

The flavor of Finca Kilimanjaro is unique and classic. The dark berry characteristic otherwise found only in Kenya is unmistakable; coffee tasters most often describe this characteristic as “blackcurrant.” This presents itself as a sweet, fruity, juicy taste, which makes the coffee mouthwatering and complex. There is an underlying caramel sweetness to the coffee, and layer after layer of deep body and silky, plush richness. This is an exquisite coffee experience.

Thanks so much to Aida for sharing this unique and amazing coffee with us. We treasure it.

Peter Giuliano, Director of Coffee

