



*Photo: Ricky Vernandes Setiady*

## Happening Now - Coffee's 4<sup>th</sup> Wave

***Definition: '4<sup>th</sup> Wave' is '3<sup>rd</sup> Wave' happening in coffee growing countries.***

From the mass consumption of Robusta coffee of unknown origin, to specialty Arabica coffee from known origin, coffees' 4<sup>th</sup> wave is washing over us. The very people that produce coffee are now drinking 'origin'.

The locus of coffee experimentation is shifting away from coffee consuming countries into coffee growing countries. Local knowledge, regional connections and increased disposable income are changing the global coffee market in ways that are just beginning to be appreciated. By farming, processing, roasting and brewing coffee with an intimate understanding of their products origin, people in coffee growing countries are opening new flavours for the world to explore.

Throughout Central America, South East Asia and Africa radical developments in coffee processing are leading this prominent "global south" trend. Micro- lot processing, specialty coffee roasting, single origin cafes, experimental product design and a growing middle class are all pointers to change.

In Trish Rothgeb's definition of Coffee Waves we are currently in the third

wave of coffee connoisseurship, where beans are sourced from farms instead of countries, roasting is about bringing out rather than disguising the unique characteristics of each bean, and flavour is clean, distinct and pure.

If 3<sup>rd</sup> Wave coffee happened in coffee consuming countries 4<sup>th</sup> Wave is a '3<sup>rd</sup> Wave' sensibility happening in coffee producing countries, now. Countries that grow coffee are the new centers of 4<sup>th</sup> Wave.



Photo: Ricky Vernandes Setiady

Rothgeb's's observations of 'Coffee Waves' derives from a Western consuming, 'non coffee- growing' country's view of the world's coffee trends. Consumers in coffee producing countries however, have their own history of Coffee Waves but their history is a very different one to the West. Coffee is a fruit, a drug and has always been political. Hundreds of years of colonization, poverty, civil wars, dictatorships and repression to name just a few are all part of this unspoken history and definitely not discussed in the current 3<sup>rd</sup> Wave dialogue.



*Photo: Rodney Glick*

From the Tropic of Cancer to the Tropic of Capricorn countries that produce coffee are now consuming their own Specialty coffee drinks, the coffee that has historically been exported – the good stuff. All the knowledge and practices of 3<sup>rd</sup> Wave happening in countries such as Europe, USA, and Japan for decades are now being adapted, applied and enjoyed in countries that grow coffee.

The specialty coffee market in producing countries now drinks high quality processed green beans that are creatively roasted by local roasters, and brewed by experienced local baristas. A 3<sup>rd</sup> Wave focus towards improving agricultural produce is defining the 4<sup>th</sup> Wave.

4<sup>th</sup> Wave coffee is happening right now- but not in 3<sup>rd</sup> Wave coffee consuming countries. These markets do not farm or process the coffee they drink. They may meet a farmer and shake hands with one, have their photo taken standing at the farm gate but they don't live in the country where the growing and processing is done. The farm visit may go in some way to provide the coffee's provenance in their own market place but there's no way around it; 3<sup>rd</sup> Wave coffee consuming countries don't grow coffee, apart from Taiwan and, for much of the world, Taiwan isn't a country.

Consuming countries are distant from origin. Coffee farming, processing, roasting and brewing at the source, where coffee is actually produced, are the fundamental ingredients driving the transition from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> Wave.



*Photo: Rodney Glick*

The growing middle class in countries like Brazil, Panama, Kenya and Indonesia are now turning their attention to the quality of their own agricultural produce and coffee is becoming a major part of their focus. This happens in any country where you have enough people having adequate money to spend on goods that is no longer essential for their family's survival.

4<sup>th</sup> Wave has snuck up from behind 3<sup>rd</sup> Wavers. Whilst they have been busy refining their techniques and technologies, coffee people in coffee producing countries have been studying hard; learning the moves, listening and earning money to start growing and processing high quality coffee. Coffee processed and roasted primarily for their domestic markets and not for export. 4<sup>th</sup> Wave is changing the dynamic, shifting the emphasis away from overseas buyers, and keeping the export quality coffee in the local market.

Customers are demanding better quality drinks from their own country's agricultural products. There is a growing middle class that can now pay for this quality. This is a seismic shift. With a combined population of over two

billion people throughout Brazil, China, India and Indonesia the domestic Specialty Coffee markets throughout the coffee growing belt are booming.

Having transparency in the supply chain is not a totally radical shift in coffee thought. It was really just the next logical step for 3<sup>rd</sup> Wave coffee. When you're running a micro- roasting specialty coffee business in San Fransisco, Melbourne, or Amsterdam, having a chance to go to farm in any coffee growing country for a few days is a marketing exercise and a little bit of a break from routine, nice to do, but not earth- shattering.



*Photo: Ming-Chi Yang*

When you're operating a roasting business, for example in Indonesia and have the chance to spend the coffee harvest processing your own green beans because you can, because you live one hour from the farms then this starts to become interesting. When your product already has a local market due to your retail outlets or wholesale roasting distribution networks then this becomes even more attractive. When the prices for your processed green

beans are high enough within the domestic market to make export unnecessary then the roaster in USA, Holland or Australia won't get a chance to buy your product because you're not exporting. Multiply this scenario thousands of times and you'll realize that people in coffee growing countries can now not only drink more interesting coffee but those specialty coffees that do eventually make it into the export market may well fetch a premium price.

4<sup>th</sup> Wave focuses on coffee as an agency for change. Using social media, what was once the farmers lot to live in relative isolation is now turned into a positive. Isolated mountain farmers in Sulawesi, Ethiopia and Columbia can now chat online with baristas in Boston, Paris and St Petersburg.



*Photo: Ricky Vernandes Setiady*

Regional coffee knowledge is now shared within a global community through numerous Internet platforms bringing distinct local community concerns into a broader, worldwide forum. These 4<sup>th</sup> Wave ideas are then reflected back into 3<sup>rd</sup> Wave consuming countries through a greater awareness of issues

effecting people growing coffee. Technology is helping to connect the different disparate coffee tribes. Focused on a changing climate, agricultural practices, poverty, accreditation of origin, water conservation, processing, market pricing, styles of brewing and taste, coffee becomes the medium for societal reform.

4<sup>th</sup> Wave is a current set of 3<sup>rd</sup> Wave ideas happening in coffee producing countries creatively applied with new discipline. Where, being served a coffee by a barista who actually processed their green beans is vastly different than being served a coffee that is just well... well- made.

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#### *About the Author*

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