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Mr. Espresso Debuts Rwandan, Burundian Blends

The coffees were produced by female farmers.

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Published: August 27, 2018

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IMAGE: KRISTAN LAWSON

Celebrating its fortieth anniversary this year, family-owned and Oakland-based coffee roastery **Mr. Espresso** has just released two new blends from Africa: Burundi women of Kinyovu and Rwanda Bufcafe Remera (which currently holds a sky-high 92 rating on CoffeeReview.com).

The International Women in Coffee Alliance (IWCA) has designated Burundi Women of Kinyovu coffee as a “Women’s Certified Coffee.” Its producers are all women with small holding farms containing between 25 and fifty trees each in

the northern Burundi province of Kayanza.

Landlocked and about the size of Maryland, Rwanda has been earmarked by coffee buyers for its amazing coffee-growing potential.

Epiphanie Mukashyaka established the Bufcafe washing station after losing many relatives during the devastating Rwandan genocide. Today the Bufcafe company — which she helms with her son, Samuel Muhirwa — is considered a jewel in the Rwandan specialty-coffee crown.

John DiRuocco, who is Mr. Espresso's second-generation owner as well as its green coffee buyer and quality control supervisor, became aware of this coffee through native Burundian coffee importer Jeanine Niyonzima-Aroian.

"She was conducting a tasting of women-produced coffees late last year," DiRuocco said, "and this is one that really stood out for its superb cup characteristics. Interestingly enough, a couple other notable Bay Area roasters have also purchased this coffee since then."

It is at the Kinyovu Washing Station where the female farmers complete the processing of their beans and are rewarded with premiums — which they then put toward advancing their farms and supporting their children.

"I first met Jeanine during my trip to Burundi in 2012," DiRuocco said. "She was part of a USAID-funded project that was working to develop the burgeoning specialty-coffee industry in Burundi. I had been invited by the project to visit some of the coffee lands and taste some of the coffees that they had been working on developing."

Niyonzima-Aroian is also the founding member of the Burundi Friends International nonprofit, which seeks to provide aid for economic development and children's education.

"Her company is focused on providing market access and quality premiums to producers of high-quality Burundian coffee with a particular focus on women-produced coffee," DiRuocco explained.

The level of poverty in current-day Burundi had a deep emotional effect on him.

"Over the years I've traveled to many coffee-producing countries in Latin America and Africa, but the poverty I saw in Burundi was probably the greatest I've experienced.

"As you go through your day, you notice it — but it doesn't seem to affect you, maybe because there are a lot of other things to focus on at the time. But at night, I couldn't sleep. We were there five days, and each night I would stay up for two, three, sometimes four hours until I would give in and take a sleeping pill so I could get some rest before the next day."

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