



ETHIOPIA GUJI 1 NATURAL ORGANIC SHAKISO GATAME MUKA GRAINPRO

Notes: CHERRY, STRAWBERRY, JASMINE, CUSTARD

ORIGIN INFORMATION

Grower	Jilo Barko, Jarso Muda, and Teklu Miju
Variety	Indigenous heirloom
Region	Gatame Muka, Shakiso, Guji Zone, Oromia Region, Ethiopia
Harvest	November - February
Altitude	1600 - 1900 masl
Soil	Vertisol
Process	Full natural and dried on raised beds
Certifications	Organic

BACKGROUND DETAILS

It's hard to convey the sense of sublime remoteness unique to the forests of Guji. The sheer natural immensity of the canopy, the heavy quiet of the forest floor, the treetop civilizations of colobus monkeys and thick-billed ravens chatting about overhead. The landscape here is part natural artifact, part testament to human perseverance. The Guji people have long waged all the weapons of custom, legislation, and outright social unrest in the name of preservation. Just recently, the communities in the Odo Shakiso woreda, home to the three farmers whose coffee comprises this Crown Jewel, successfully protested and blocked the renewal of one of Ethiopia's most lucrative gold mines, citing equal damage to the land and public health and forcing a national conversation about the impact of the billionaire-run company in charge. The Guji peoples' value for natural heritage expresses well in its agriculture management, too. To win a permit for building a coffee estate, it's not enough to be organic; the business plan needs to include forest preservation and community investment as well. These days, coffee production in Guji zone—a section of the vast Oromia Region that juts south and east from the coffee-famous landscape of Gedeb—is developing fast.



Particularly in the form of coffee estates, which, though not unprecedented in Ethiopia's history, are putting modern roots here and changing the prospects not only for Guji as a name in the global market, but for the hundreds of thousands of remote smallholders here, many of whom for decades have lacked equitable cherry marketplaces in their home communities. Guji Highlands is one such business, begun in 2012 and currently one of the more diversified coffee teams in all of Ethiopia. The Guji Highlands estate is a sprawling 250-hectare property of blended coffee cultivation and old-growth forest. As an estate they are planted in virgin soil, and their coffee trees are adorably juvenile compared to the long-established coffee zones elsewhere in Ethiopia. Not to be overlooked, however, is the estate-as-local-resource-pipeline effect for existing smallholder farmers. Processing, drying, storage, transport, milling, marketing and exporting are immense undertakings requiring vast resources and scale, so having a local partner to provide this chain of services is a godsend for remote farmers with quality potential. Which brings us to the coffee's name, Gatame Muka. This particular Crown Jewel is the combined product of three farmers from the Gatame Muka community in Shakiso, who have partnered with Guji Highlands as a processor and exporter. Jilo Barko, Jarso Muda, and Teklu Miju cultivate a total of 31 hectares of coffee combined across their family farms, along with subsistence crops and local market produce. Even properties this "small" in the scope of global coffee production require a staff of 30 or more employees each just to pull off a successful harvest—and that is not including processing, storage, or the rest of it, of course. And the coffee? It's all the better: evolving cup profiles from this area have converted sworn Yirgacheffe lovers by combining the seductive aromatics of Gedeo zone with candylike cup structures, tangy lactic acidity, and, in the case of the best sundried coffees, mouthwatering tropical fruit. This particular lot from the Gatame Muka farmers shows a range of syrupy textures and fruit flavors. It's also one of the year's very first Grade 1 natural arrivals from Ethiopia; itself always a kind of holiday, but this year in particular despite COVID-19 delays in transportation, and flash flooding in the transit line for southern coffees, is a particular moment of relief and symbol of resilience. The top qualities we see in Guji across the board are understandable given the landscape: if you embed expert processing in the heart of production, establish clear standards for interested growers, and pay well for the privilege of doing so, you're bound to capture the best the land has to offer. Around the Guji Highland Estate where farms reach to 1900 meters and a single pesticide has never been used, that "best" is truly, truly something. Against the civilization-old coffee culture of the Oromo people and region, Guji now looks like a lightning bolt of industrialization. Albeit, in their own, exemplary way.