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WE SELL BADASS COFFEE ON OUR OWN TERMS

We're not trying to take over the world — but it could happen

NEW YORK— November 14, 2008. Photographer Clay Enos has founded the Organic Coffee Cartel, a new speciality coffee company using the long-dormant URL OrganicCoffee.com. The OCC's mission is simple: To become the world's most charitable coffee.

Enos (clayenos.com) was inspired during a 2006 assignment in Oaxaca, Mexico, where he found himself surrounded by the industry's top professionals including David Griswold of Sustainable Harvest Coffee Importers; Mark Inman of Taylor Maid Farms; Christy Thorns of Allegro Coffee; Peter Guiliano of Counter Culture Coffee; and Julie Beals of Fresh Cup Magazine.

He became intrigued by the so-called "Third Wave" of coffee, whereby coffee is treated more like a fine wine than just a morning necessity. This movement acknowledges, respects, and even pays tribute to the unique skills of everyone in the coffee supply chain.

Soon, the idea for the OCC was born.

"The goal is to spoil the consumer with the world's best whole-bean coffees and in turn, honor everyone who made that cup possible," says Enos.

The OCC sells 10-oz. collectable tins of seasonably available, limited-edition, single-origin coffees sourced, imported and roasted by Cartel members. Each run of cans features a different photograph from Enos' coffee-related travels.

As the OCC grows, additional regional roasters will be tapped in order to reduce carbon footprints associated with shipping.

There are no salaries drawn at the OCC, and the majority of profits are given away to coffee-related charities. This is possible thanks to friends being leaned on and favors called in. Much as Robin Hood was backed by his Merry Men, Enos is grateful for his ever-growing band of believers who are backing his "outlaw" effort to make the world a little more fair and caffeinated while taking Sherwood Forrest organic.

For additional information on the Organic Coffee Cartel contact Clay Enos or visit OrganicCoffee.com.

Email robinhood@organiccoffee.com for samples.

ABOUT THE ORGANIC COFFEE CARTEL: The OCC® is a loose federation of numerous coffee professionals and one photographer who are pooling their knowledge, talents, relationships and resources to create a charitable coffee company that blends creativity, quality and goodwill.

— END —



A Simple Idea Becomes A Reality

In March 2007, I was a New York-based photographer riding on the rural back roads of Southern Mexico, in a van with a handful of specialty coffee professionals: roasters, writers, agronomists and traders, all on hand for a unique coffee-buying trip.

New to the coffee industry, I was wide-eyed when I heard from these pros about historically low coffee prices that put communities at risk and the lack of market information that hindered farmers from getting fair prices for their hand-selected organic coffee beans. But I also saw the relationships between these buyers and the growers in Mexico as powerful tools for change, where challenges faced by farmers were being addressed with peer-to-peer training and sharing of best practices.

That week in Mexico, with lots of input from everyone, I committed to create a new, charitable coffee label, and the Organic Coffee Cartel was born, with all those in the van as de-facto founding members. We'd sell quality coffee and then turn around and use the money for charitable good all while having fun and thumbing our noses at conventional design and branding. The whole idea is to do good with great coffee—and to have fun doing it. So far, we've kept to the plan.

The Coffees

The OCC's limited-edition specialty coffees change with the seasons. This way, you get to enjoy them at their pinnacle of freshness and flavor. It's more of the mindset you'd bring to summer tomatoes or autumn apples. OCC coffees connect you to the exotic micro-regions of Africa, Central America and South America, and to the personalities behind them. Unlike so many mass-produced beverages, specialty coffee allows for a direct connection with a place and a people. Anyone who has visited a winery knows the sentimental value meeting the winemaker and seeing their operation. Accessing a coffee farm is often harder due to their remoteness but with the OCC, we hope folks can engage that world just a little more easily.

OCC coffees are 100-percent organically grown and roasted on equipment that uses 85 percent less energy than other roasters. The coffee is then packaged in steel cans—the most eco-friendly material available. And each 10,000-can run is uniquely printed with original photographs taken at origin.

Our aim is to positively impact the people, communities and environments in which we all work. Since quality coffee reaps quality prices, the OCC works with coffee farmers to improve their coffees and pays them the prices they deserve. With a viable income, coffee farming families and their communities are stabilized and their quality of life is improved. Traditions and cultures are preserved.

The Cartel Business Structure

There was talk early on about making the OCC a 501(c)(3) non-profit company but the logistics and expenses associated with that process seemed like a waste of time if the whole premise of the Cartel is to give our profits away. The tax consequences are simply irrelevant regardless of our corporate structure. For now, the OCC is an LLC owned by me and my dad and the majority of our profits are used to offset the costs of Let's Talk Coffee.



The Charitable Mission

For the past five years, Sustainable Harvest, the OCC's importer, has hosted Let's Talk Coffee. The annual three-day event brings together our supply chain partners and stakeholders in the specialty coffee industry. LTC assembles farmers, cooperative leaders, roasters, industry visionaries, market analysts and business experts, providing a forum for everyone to meet face to face. This year, nearly 300 participants from 20 countries received industry-specific training, listened to expert presentations designed to help improve supply-chain quality, and shared best practices among their peers. The cumulative impact of six consecutive years of training at Let's Talk Coffee has resulted in added value in economic, social and environmental spheres.

In 2009, Let's Talk Coffee became a not-for-profit event. Sustainable Harvest remains the founder and primary funder of LTC, while the event is now managed as a program of the Charitable Partnership Fund, an Oregon 501(c)(3) organization. This has opened the door for the Organic Coffee Cartel to put the majority of its profits toward Let's Talk Coffee and its associated efforts. In a perfect world the entire event would be funded by our coffee sales rather than the generosity of Sustainable Harvest. After all, the real profit margins are in roasting, not importing.

The OCC is committed to giving back money to the folks who need it most. Everyone in the Cartel has day jobs. But we nonetheless cling to the transformative power of business when it focuses on the greater good. By buying our coffee, you spoil yourself and make the world a better place. That doesn't happen too often.

The Focus on Quality

Unlike real cartels, our entire operation is intended to be transparent. If you would like to see how the money is spent feel free to email us asking to take a closer look. We have a basic spreadsheet that breaks things down to the nitty gritty. And let's be clear here. No one is taking a salary at this point. We're funding this with our other jobs, credit cards and on the simple premise that it's more fun to make this happen than to create a personal gravy train. What would Robin Hood do, after all?

My whole life, my father has been a wine importer. It was fancy stuff that I took for granted. Only with age did I learn of the choices he'd made to work with family wineries who valued tradition over marketing. While no one was hurting financially, the bottom line was never the primary motivation. When pondering the creation of the OCC, it seemed perfectly natural for me to take that same approach—and it's one reason I asked my dad to be part of the OCC.

Luckily, the world of specialty coffee is filled with good intentions. A visit to the SCAA's annual conference enables one to learn about a dizzying array of charitable tie-ins and development programs funded by coffee. One of the more remarkable things I took away is that drinking better coffee directly results in improving the lives of everyone who made that cup possible in the first place. And conversely, drinking crappy coffee brings all but the fat-cat executives down. It was yet another reason to focus on quality.



Enter our roaster, Mark Inman at Taylor Maid Farms. When it comes to quality, his credentials are bulletproof. He understands that coffee is a lot more than just a morning ritual. Reading Taylor Maid's take on the things that make great coffee is instructive and inspiring.

Another quality maven is David Griswold, President of Sustainable Harvest Specialty Coffee Importers and the OCC's importer. His vision and generosity is the reason we have the URL organiccoffee.com and his inspired principles allowed for the creation of the OCC in the first place. While most coffee companies obscure the fact that there is someone or some company between them and the farmers, we proudly acknowledge Sustainable Harvest's participation. He and his staff are invaluable to our efforts. Their notion of Relationship Coffee and how it pertains to quality is a cornerstone of the Organic Coffee Cartel.

The Creative Emphasis

I wasn't in the coffee business. I held neither allegiance nor references to existing brands. I didn't even drink coffee. So it seemed natural that any branding of the Organic Coffee Cartel would be original simply because I didn't have a clue. I'm a photographer, so obviously photography would play a critical role in the overall aesthetic, but everything else was yet to be determined. I was inspired by all the ideas being shared in Oaxaca and spent all my free time developing logos and creating mock postcard advertisements.

Dave Griswold was particularly enthused, but it was Julie Beals, whose familiarity with the traditional approaches to marketing, was most valuable. It seems I had taken "the coffee look" somewhere new and their creative encouragement was what lingered longest. When I later found myself in Tanzania to make photographs for Sustainable Harvest, the OCC aesthetic had become a familiar motivation and a fun diversion from the photos I'd been hired to make.

The whole idea, for me, was to simply have fun with this stuff. Be irreverent. Be quirky. Be strange. Be beautiful. The OCC didn't need to be profitable in the traditional sense so why should we feel obliged to dull-down or mass-market our messaging? We didn't. If it makes me laugh or tilt my head with a smile, I'm likely to save it for future use. Some may shrug their shoulders at our "edginess" but that too is a sign we might be in the right place. "We're the OCC," I'll say. "We don't need to pander."

And needless to say, that kind of independence is an invitation for the muses to arrive. While I can't vouch that every effort we make will be successful, we sure hope to be original and at best inspiring. The plan is to have more and more cans and sell more and more coffee. The cans, the labels, the names of the coffees, the marketing and promotions all need to be fun before we measure their market effectiveness. When there's no question about our coffee quality, a lot more mind-share can be given to the stuff that surrounds it.

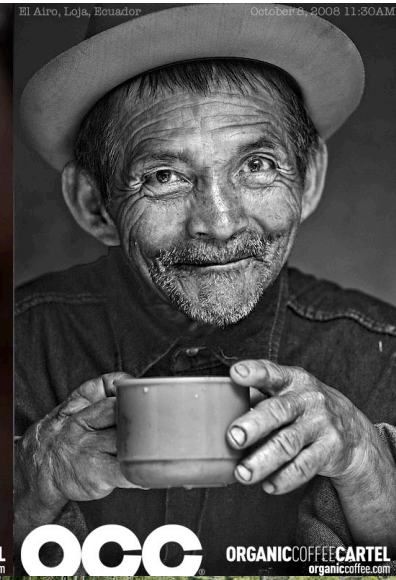
Finally, this is a virtual mom-and-pop operation right now but we'd love to see it grow and expand its reach. More coffee, more visual input, more quirky marketing. I invite all of our supporters to share ideas with me.

OCC[®]

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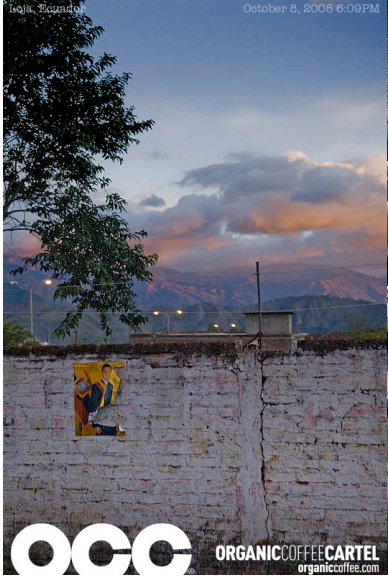
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