



Scouting a Good Cup of Coffee

This family-run coffee company is supporting Mississippi mothers

BY CAROLINE EUBANKS

Like it did for many, the pandemic brought a period of reexamination for Alison Gray Anderson and her daughters, Wade and Hollis Johnson. During this time, the women cofounded a company that supports women-run coffee cooperatives and growers in countries that rely on coffee income. They called the operation Exploradora Coffee, which comes from the Spanish word for “scout,” the name of their beloved dog. “This had been percolating for a couple years before that because my husband [Dave Anderson of the Roastery of Cave Creek in Arizona] is in the coffee business, and he’s been doing this for 25-plus years,” Anderson says. “Wade and I both have traveled with him, and we felt like there was an opportunity to really highlight what female farmers were doing.” For the founders of Exploradora, it’s about treating farmers fairly (which isn’t always standard within the industry) through fair pay and job training, including providing a quality-control lab where the producers learn invaluable skills like processing and cupping. “Something we’ve learned is when you pay a premium for your coffee, when you’re able to give money back to those communities, you find that the farmers

themselves will come up with new, innovative ways to make coffee growing more sustainable,” Anderson says. While Exploradora sources from Africa, Indonesia, and Central and South America, a big part of their ethos is also supporting those in their own backyard: They donate \$1 from every bag of coffee sold to an affordable housing nonprofit for women in Jackson, Mississippi, where the family originally lived and where they continued to spend summers after moving away.

“To me, Mississippi is our roots. And so being able to be of service to those roots is really vital,” says Wade. “We feel it’s important to be of service to the communities where you’re from or where you live.” In searching for nonprofits to support, they learned about Springboard to Opportunities, an organization that offers financial support to Black mothers. Sustainability and waste management is another big factor within the business. Exploradora donates the



burlap bags their beans arrive in to Mississippi-area farmers, who use it for livestock bedding; and the chaff (or husks) from the beans are composted for mushroom harvesting. They also have a growler program where locals in Oxford can swap out empties for a full container of coffee.

Family is a big part of what makes Exploradora unique, as the whole clan is involved. “We are incredibly lucky to be able to work together,” says Wade. “I think when we get together and we’re able to collaborate, we come up with really exciting ideas and we all have different things that we bring to the table.” Wade and Anderson serve as co-CEOs, both working to source beans, oversee roast profiles, and develop marketing materials. Wade’s sister, Hollis, oversees Exploradora’s social media and collects research on their partner farms. In November, Exploradora Coffee opened a new roastery in Oxford at the Chicory Market, an artisan grocery store, with an honor box stocked with varieties of organic and fair trade beans. The company also supplies its coffee to other businesses around town, including beloved restaurants like St. Leo and Snackbar as well as The Oliver Hotel. It might not have been possible without some time to ponder during the pandemic, says Anderson. “Seeing the rewards of that effort is really great. It is very hard; it is very scary. But the best part is getting to work with my family.”

MIGHT PEACE COFFEE IMPORTERS; OPPOSITE: PRICE MCNEESE

WHERE TO BUY



The Chicory Market, Oxford, Mississippi
exploradoracoffee.com



Blends Not to Miss
Fair trade organic
Honduran medium roast,
10 ounces, **\$17**



Around the World blend
medium roast,
10 ounces, **\$17**



Exploradora cold brew
10-ounce can
4-pack, **\$18**