

FOUNDATIONAL BELIEFS

FRAMING THE CONVERSATION

1. WE BELIEVE COFFEE IS BROKEN.
2. WE BELIEVE THERE IS VAST POTENTIAL READY TO BE UNLOCKED IN HOW COFFEE IS GROWN AND SOLD.
3. WE BELIEVE THERE IS VAST POTENTIAL READY TO BE UNLOCKED IN HOW COFFEE IS ENJOYED.
4. WE BELIEVE WE HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY IN CREATING THIS ELEVATED EXPERIENCE OF COFFEE.
5. WE BELIEVE MEANINGFUL CONNECTION IS BOTH THE PATH AND DESTINATION.
6. WE BELIEVE SMALL IS POWERFUL.
7. WE BELIEVE HOPE IS A CHOICE.

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The vast majority of coffee enjoyed within the U.S. is a result of exploitative practices, and puts profit and ease over quality and dignity. Both coffee producers and drinkers lose out, while only a select few benefit.

These are big words, we know. Allow us to put them in some context that might better underscore their truth.

Globalization transformed the coffee industry in the 20th century, offering new opportunities for connecting supply and demand (while we did steal this line from our 8th grade history paper, please read on). Unfortunately, the system that came to dominate the industry - one that treated coffee as an interchangeable commodity - was, and still is, fundamentally broken. Producers faced wild unpredictability, paltry wages, and markets that valued quantity over quality. Customers were given the lowest common denominator of that quality.

These flaws didn't go unnoticed. People began to recognize how more value could

be unlocked across the entire system.

Enter: fair trade. Beginning in the late 80s and 90s, fair trade certification aimed to stabilize the coffee market and ensure producers could earn more reliable and reasonable wages. It was undeniably a step in the right direction. However, better is not the same as fixed. Issues of quality and differentiation still plagued the industry.

Enter: direct trade. Pioneers like Intelligentsia, Stumptown, Counter Culture, and later Ritual Roasters began seeking out better quality coffees direct from in-country producers and co-ops rather than depending on sourcing from domestic importers and traders.

But, in the years since, the term "direct trade" has gotten stretched out like an old sweater. Without official governance, it has lost any real meaning. By simply buying from a source at origin, anyone can claim "direct trade," whether or not they have any real relationship with the producer. This includes those still

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operating within the commodity coffee system.

That brings us to today, and an industry that's a hodgepodge of approaches: some undeniably good but incomplete (fair trade), some originally good but diluted (direct trade), but most just straight up bad (commodity coffee).

We're obviously not the first to see how broken coffee is. We see ourselves not as unique in this fight, but as part of a long line of pain-in-the-asses who rejected what was for what could be. Taking two steps forward requires first recognizing the very real problems that are, really, just opportunities to evolve.

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While globalization made it easier than ever to connect faraway goods with the people who wanted them, trade-offs were made. We believe that many of those trade-offs are - today - either wrong, false, or based on obsolete thinking.

With modern tools, a little bit of belief, and some elbow grease, we believe a new system can be created in which the full potential of talented producers from around the world can be unleashed.

This isn't charity work — it's just good business sense. There are so many incredible producers - and potential producers - out there, whose craft and product just need to be matched with a more appropriate market and, ultimately, coffee drinker. Our work is to go out and find them, and develop the friendship, trust, and respect needed to fully realize that potential.

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Just as the commoditization of coffee short-changed producers, it short-changed coffee drinkers.

Imagine if all wine was labeled only as red or white. Coffee has just as much depth, range, and nuance as wine, the ability to reflect terroir and different producers' styles. We believe this should be talked about, celebrated, and appreciated with each brew. We imagine a day when a barista's role is akin to that of a sommelier, when regions in Burundi and Bolivia are regarded with as much esteem as Burgundy and Napa, when visitors flock on holidays to coffee farm tours and cuppings.

Further, rather than use this potential expansiveness and depth of experience to alienate — those “in the know” versus those not — we want this renaissance of coffee to be based on connection, joy, enthusiasm, inclusivity. We meet people where they are: the newly curious with hospitality and enthusiasm; long-time enthusiasts with passion, depth, and

camaraderie. This expanded sense of what coffee can be becomes a bridge, never a barrier.

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We are but one small coffee group in the Bay Area. But that is enough.

While it is not our responsibility to fix the entire industry, it is our responsibility to work every day to improve our small corner of it, share our ideas with others, and inspire through action.

That sense of agency paired with a healthy dose of humility is core to who we are, and how we approach our work.

We also believe we're uniquely positioned to advance this vision of what's possible given the friendships, knowledge, and philosophy we've spent the last decade developing.

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While coffee is what we love and trade in, ultimately our work is about connection. Connection is the basis for two of life's greatest gifts: joy and meaning.

We grow and deepen our relationships - with customers, with producers, with teammates - through respect, humility, authenticity, and a strong belief in equality. We look for and find the light in everyone we meet, greeting them as the friend that they'll hopefully soon become.

By showing up in this way consistently, we grow the trust, knowledge, and affection between us — and the possibilities all around us.

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The magnitude of change we envision for the coffee industry is massive — yet requires smallness. The very nature of the system is based on rejecting faceless, nameless, placeless scale.

Instead of scaling the production of coffee, we want to scale human connection. One producer plus one coffee buyer, bonded through meaningful connection — repeated over and over. For each time this happens, so much is suddenly possible: better quality of life, better work conditions, better customer experiences, and, yes, better coffee.

So conversation by conversation, relationship by relationship, we believe this particular system of greatness requires smallness.

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And it's one that we choose every day.

The world can be a hard place. There is no shortage of chaos, fear, tragedy, and pain. Being hopeful can feel ridiculous at best, or futile at worst sometimes.

But - if you're really looking - it's also a beautiful place, one full of wonder right now, and full of possibility for even more. We choose to find the extraordinary in the ordinary, the light in the dark, the potential in the dismissed.

Just as importantly, we own our part in this world, realizing that we are agents of change in this ever changing reality we create together. Because of our agency, our hope has teeth.

Hope lights our lantern, while agency laces up our shoes.