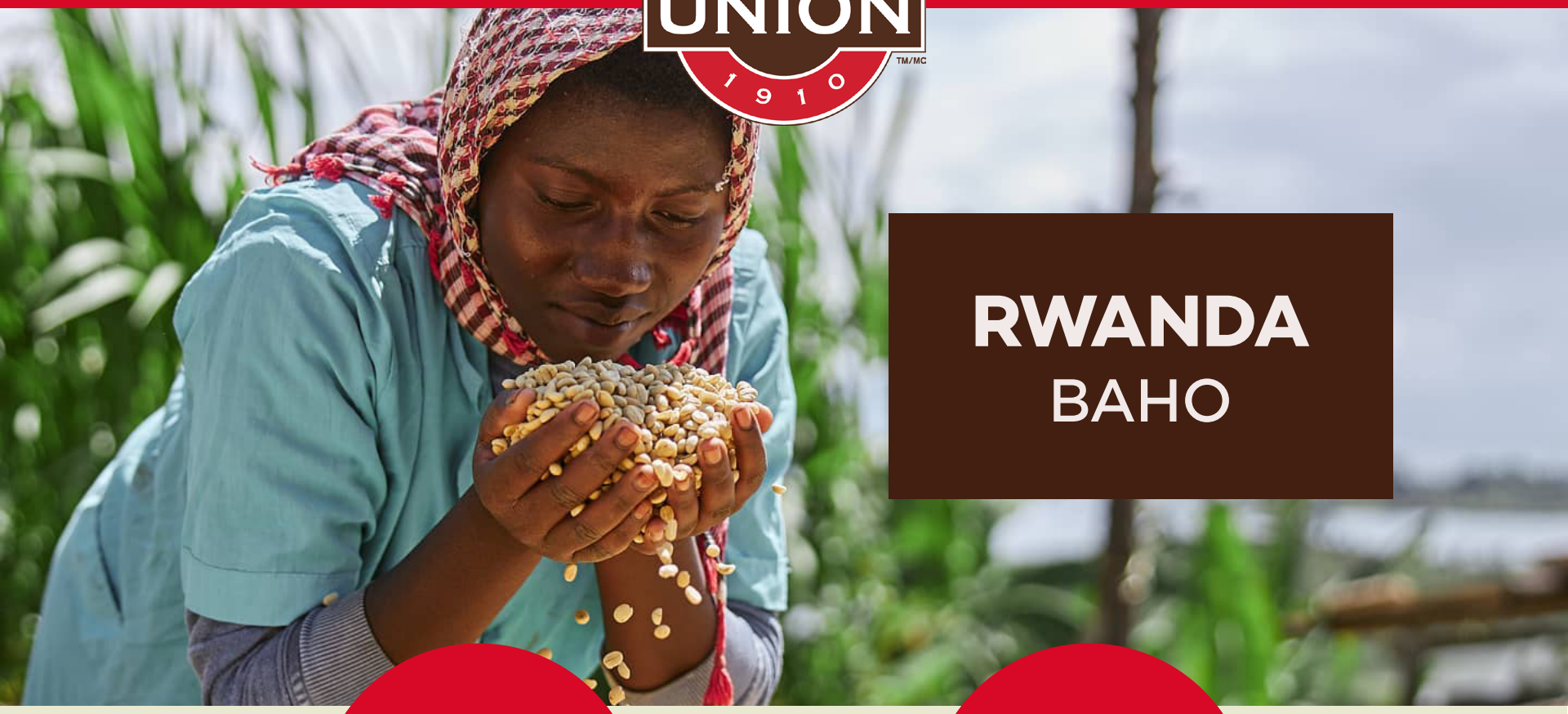


RWANDA
BAHO

Rwanda “Washed”

After its harvest, coffee first has to be dried in order to be roastable and then consumable. The “Washed” process is the most common drying process and consists of pulping the coffee seeds out of their fruit before drying them. It often results in a clear, well-defined taste in the cup which in this coffee amazingly translates into pleasant impressions of fruitiness and sweetness.

LIGHT ROAST
Peach | Blackberry | Spices

When roasted “light”, this coffee charms us with delicate notes reminiscent of the taste of a stone fruit such as peach and of blackberry. A subtle aftertaste with presences of spices balances the overall experience. We especially enjoyed the washed Rwanda as espresso, even though we usually suggest it for filters and ‘French Press’.

Rwanda “Natural”

The “Natural” process is a post-harvest drying method that usually takes more time and care. It produces less yield which is why it is often more expensive. That being said, it also results in a bolder, more complex taste in the cup. With this very special coffee, the combination of sweetness and delicate acidity may remind you of rum and tropical fruits.

LIGHT ROAST
Kiwi | Raspberry | Rum | Flowers

We usually opt for a light roast for this type of coffee as it better showcases the bold sweet aromas. Because of its full-bodied nature, we suggest trying this coffee as a filter coffee or for a French Press first. We also really enjoyed it when combined with its washed light roast version (see above), as it comes off even more round and complete.

DARK ROAST
Cocoa | Cherry | Oak

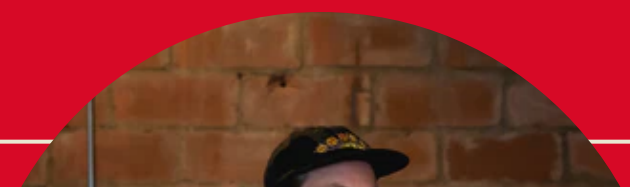
When roasted "dark", all of a sudden, this same coffee turns into a dessert with a full body, a nice caramel colour and frank notes of cocoa nibs and cherry flambéed. A pleasant oak aroma enhances the overall tasting as it comes back at the end of each sip.

Our two delicious Rwanda lots are actually blends of several small lots predominantly composed of the Bourbon cultivar, harvested in 2022 and carefully processed by Baho. Since the company is more focused on small-scale specialty grades, Baho's washing stations use higher standards than the usual mill with regard to sorting and processing coffee, in order to enhance quality and get better prices.

Context

Rwanda doesn't get as much credit as it should for the quality of its coffee. Significantly smaller in size than their producing neighbours, the country is also burdened by a traumatic past. Yet, Rwandan people still produce some of the best coffees in the world, largely thanks to Baho.

Baho is a 100% Rwandan-owned export company that also owns and manages 11 washing stations where farmers can deliver their harvests. It was founded by Emmanuel Rusatira whose main goals are to bring pride amongst the Rwandan coffee community, to provide a safer environment for employees and to reinvest into the industry in order to generate wealth and create employment.



"Beyond paying for healthcare for all his employees, Emmanuel also subsidizes the smallholders who work with him and offers free personal protective equipment and gives interest free cash advances for fertilizer during the offseason. However, one of the most impressive things Emmanuel is doing is his seedling project. With this, he's invested the equivalent of $25,000 USD into around seven million seedlings which he gives free to smallholders in and around his washing stations."

Brendan Adams, Semilla Coffee

By giving seedlings to farmers for free, Baho is investing in the growth of the Rwandan agricultural sector and, indirectly, in its own growth. Seedlings can take a few years before flowering and producing fruits, so it is clever to think ahead and replace older trees with younger, more vigorous coffee trees. On one hand, it is a simple way to increase production but on the other hand, it also can prevent soil depletion and yield loss for each farmer.

At Café Union, we already know Emmanuel Rusatira for his Abishyizehamwe lot featured within the microlot series. When the specialty coffee importer Semilla Coffee first introduced us to Emmanuel's work in 2020, we were intrigued.

How could Union play a more significant role in this initiative?

Our first idea was to buy whatever Semilla Coffee had on hand, anything that was harder to sell. In other words, we wanted to make some room in our inventory for Baho's 'leftovers'. By doing so, we had the preconceived idea that our microlot purchase would have a bigger impact for the smallholders who are trying to find their way in the specialty market. We quickly understood that bigger impacts come with bigger commitments.

This year, along with ordering the same microlot, we decided to purchase 100 bags of Baho's regional blend.

From microlot to large-scale!

"The Union Microlot info pack usually offers a thorough outlook on our coffee offerings, one of them being from Rwanda. It provides facts and specifics about the harvesting location, the geography, the processing and the people behind these coffees.

Inextricably linked to Rwandan coffee is Mr. Emmanuel Rusatira; a Rwandan entrepreneur who has been able to establish himself in the specialty coffee world.

He has helped elevate the quality through his independently owned mills, which in itself is no small feat. We have now featured his coffee on two separate occasions, each time excellent and revealing of something new and exciting.

In April 2022, I had the opportunity to meet with Mr. Rusatira at the Boston SCA Expo – lucky me.

What derived from the somewhat brief but substantial encounter was a commitment to expand on Union's offering from Rwanda.

Why? Importing coffee from another country that has a tragic history is commonplace. Doing so with no consideration of traceability or for the way the exporter operates maintains the climate of vulnerability coffee producers can find themselves in. What is unique and meaningful is to be able to partner with Emmanuel and negotiate a fairer fixed-price by adding his coffee to our large-scale conventional collection. This then allows us to be involved in a story, in a purpose and in a relationship.

You will now find Rwandan coffee offerings (natural and washed) across our coffee line up."

James Kouri, Café Union

In January 2023, the C-Market price (that regulates most conventional coffee trades) was fluctuating between 1.44 and 1.72 US Dollar a pound.

At the same time, Café Union paid Semilla 4.00 USD for each pound of Baho's "Washed" lot, and 4.45 USD for each pound of their "Natural" lot. For a total of 13,227 pounds.

Of those prices, respectively 3.00 USD/lbs and 3.40 USD/lbs went to the exporter (Baho Coffee), from which farmers got 650 Rwandan Francs (RWF) for each kilogram of coffee fruits harvested and delivered to one of its washing stations. In January 2023, 650 RWF was worth 0.59 USD which represents 55% more than the national farmgate price according to NAEB.

In producing countries of Africa, very few farmers get to have a large coffee plantation as we can see elsewhere in the world. Most of them simply collect the fruits from coffee trees they might have on their land, amongst other crops, and can't really imagine making a living out of coffee harvests alone. Baho is trying to change that.

"Baho's vision on community is guided by having a synergetic relationship with the community of farmers that we work with, where we guide them and create solutions in a replicable, sustainable and scalable manner leading to economic growth and poverty reduction."

To put these figures in perspective, in Kigali, one green bell pepper can cost 290 RWF, one cauliflower can cost 940 RWF and one tin of sardines would be 1500 RWF.

Emmanuel Rusatira, Baho Coffee

Generating pride

The founder and managing director Emmanuel Rusatira believes in empowering and supporting his community by investing in health care insurance, in financing programs and in agricultural supplies.

He also believes in the beneficial impact of seeing a 100% Rwandan business operation, while demonstrating :

the parity between men and women in many of his teams,

the groups of farmers selling their coffee for more money by cooperating and specializing,

an increasing production both in quantity and quality,

with the addition of more exposure than ever overseas for Rwandan specialty coffee.

Emmanuel's motivation comes from a clear, well-defined plan which amazingly translates in his actions over the years. For our part, we have to commit to a bolder, more complex approach in order to play a more significant role in the industry. By doing so, we can hope to contribute to strengthening the base of our culture and redefine our current purpose as coffee roasters.

Photos credits:
Baho Coffee
Semilla Coffee
Café Union

"Today, we recognize a coffee market segmentation that this guide defines as standard, premium and specialized. This evolution towards higher-value markets underlines changing consumption patterns. To succeed, a product now requires economic and social impact. Consumers and producers start to associate product quality with sustainability, and consider how it affects the environment and the lives of the people 'behind the cup'."

The Coffee Guide (2022), International Trade Center