

HONG KONG

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另附名店VIP指南

5 MOST COMPLEX
WATCHES OF 2013

KUNG CHI-SHING
FREEING MUSIC FROM
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AWESOME 'I DO'S'
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GIGI LEUNG

HOW HER SPANISH HUSBAND OPENED HER HEART



HKS45

FASHION ♦ LUXURY ♦ LIFESTYLE

WHAT'S BREWING? Hong Kong's hippest cafes, buzzing baristas and hottest cups of coffee.

BY RIVA HIRANAND

CAFFEINE FIX: KOPI LUWAK THE MOST EXPENSIVE COFFEE IN THE WORLD

It's not everyday you get summoned to a behind-closed-doors coffee tasting, lured by the promises of a mind-blowing backstory and unique coffee to match. Then again it's not everyday you meet someone who has given up his 12-year background in finance and a fancy Hong Kong pad to live in Aceh, Indonesia to create coffee.

Matthew Ross, co-founder of Sijahtra Coffee, is impeccably dressed and the bearer of a beaker of coffee he has lovingly carried around Central for this meeting. His company specialises in the production of kopi luwak (civet coffee), billed as the most elusive and luxurious coffee in the world. It has also been targeted as an issue of concern by international animal rights' activists [see below]. Beans are from coffee berries that have been excreted by civet cats in Indonesia. "The wild civet cat has a varied diet, and everything it eats imparts a unique flavour to the coffee," explains Ross.

Lured to the scientific aspects of coffee by his background in medical microbiology, Ross left his job in banking in 2009 and devoted himself to creating the best tasting kopi luwak in the world. "A grandiose statement I know," he says with an earnest smile. "But I thought it was only being sold on its story, when inherently it also had the potential to be a great tasting coffee."

The Sijahtra team (including Ross) scours the high-altitude villages in Takengon, central Aceh for beans. He does not take anything over 12 hours old; the best two kilos from each of his 27 farmers are couriered overnight to the Sijahtra laboratory and processing house in the provincial capital, Banda Aceh (the rest are sold to other buyers).

Ross has brought a sample of his luwak, which is made using a Japanese ice drip method, extracted over a period of eight hours. He explains that each kilo has a unique flavour profile. "We can



Coffee beans in Takengon, before they are eaten by civet cats

ensure the level of our coffee will always be very high, but until we cup it we have no idea what it will give us in taste; no two are ever the same. This is in its very essence a true delicacy," he says.

"Most people believe coffee needs milk and sugar, but this is not the case with our coffee, which has notes of brown sugar, caramel and chocolate tones balanced with fruity acidity. The flavour lingers and develops on the palate like great wine."

Sijahtra Coffee is available from Harrods or online (<http://rarefiedcoffee.com>) in limited quantities. It will be available from Great in Hong Kong in 2014.



SPILLING THE BEANS . . .

with **J.J. ACUNA**, architect, interior designer and founder of www.wanderlister.com

Why coffee? I'm an addict. I need it to get going in the morning, after an amazing dinner at night.

First-ever cup? As an eighth-grader studying for finals, I thought I was man enough to drink from our drip coffee maker at home!

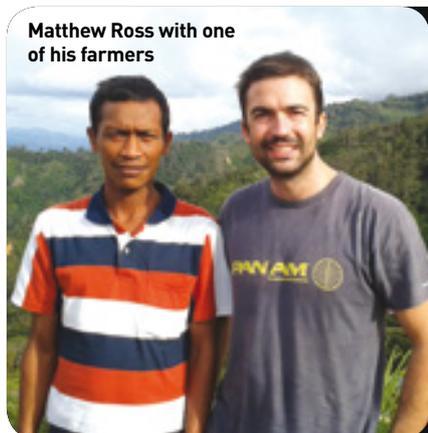
Daily dose? I used to go four cups, now I'm down to one or two.

Cha chaan teng or cafe? Cafe – I like wide-open spaces to read and work.

Black or white? I take my coffee with just a touch of soy milk.

Best latte art? I really don't like latte art – it tells you nothing about the coffee.

Favourite cup of joe in Hong Kong? Unar Coffee in my hood, Tai Hang. There is a balance in the strength and body of the espresso they serve – not too watery or light. It's not a big cup, but I appreciate that because they focus on taste and aroma.



Matthew Ross with one of his farmers

STORM IN A COFFEE CUP

Kopi luwak has faced bad press – stories about civets being kept in cages and force-fed coffee berries – but Ross is not rattled when I mention this. "Our luwak is truly wild luwak, not caged. The idea was to make a delicacy with a conscience," he says. "Our other aim is to improve and empower the lives of everyone involved in the creation of our coffee. We go to great lengths to identify the perfect farm, and we know all of our farmers personally."

As Ross points out, this is not the case when it comes to much of the kopi luwak that is available.

This was also made evident when British coffee connoisseur Tony Wild called for an end to the kopi luwak industry on the grounds of animal cruelty, causing the Langham Hong Kong, Intercontinental Hong Kong and Landmark Mandarin Oriental to pull it from their menus; in London Ross was faced with Harrods doing the same. However, an introduction was made to Wild, and even he, the most vehement of kopi luwak critics, was convinced of Ross' unwavering ethics. Harrods has since dropped other kopi luwak suppliers and is solely stocking Sijahtra, while Wild has put his campaign against kopi luwak on hold.