

## Martha Castiblanco & Oscar Nazareth

## Nicaragua

Farm(s):	Finca Linda Vista
Region:	Jinotega
Country:	Nicaragua
Association:	Sajonia Estate
Altitude:	1300 – 1450 masl
Varieties:	Catuai, Caturra, Pacamara, Parainema, Maracaturra, Java, Maragogype
Process:	Washed and Natural

Martha Castiblanco and her husband Oscar Nazareth own and run the two neighbouring farms Finca Alejandra and Finca Linda Vista. Both farms are participating members of the *Las Fincas Collection*, a project developed by Sajonia Estate in Matagalpa that assists medium-sized growers in producing high quality microlot coffees. *Las Fincas* was instigated in 2018 and aims to support farms located in coffee producing areas where special lots are obtainable due to high altitude, fertile soil, innovative variety cultivation or good agricultural management. The initiative focuses on providing technical advice in post-harvest management, whilst supporting the entire processing chain at farm level to generate and maintain quality coffee production. Sajonia have recently invested in drying and processing facilities at their site in Matagalpa, such as outdoor raised beds, tiered raised beds within netted shade greenhouses and pop-up patios, to create the space and potential for high quality coffee processing. They can accept either cherry or parchment coffee from neighbouring farms for processing and can employ different fermentations such as carbonic or anaerobic maceration, individualising microlots from producers and creating more diversity and quality in output.

The main farm, Finca Linda Vista, has been in Oscar's family for 65 years, being founded by his grandfather in 1955. Under the family's management the farm has demonstrated exceptional quality for many years, winning the Best Cup Award, *Taza de la Exelencia*, consecutively in 2002 and 2003, and falling within the finalists in the competition every other year. Oscar and Martha took over the running of the farm 13 years ago and in 2019 separated out Finca Alejandra as an annex to the main property. Today coffee grown on Linda Vista is marketed under Martha's name and that grown on Alejandra under Oscar's. The husband and wife team are a great example of how partnership, support and passion can produce some exceptional coffee.

The two farms are in Jinotega in the north central region of Nicaragua. Jinotega is a region synonymous with quality coffee. With its natural forest ecosystems, valleys, mountains and sub-tropical climate, the region has ideal growing conditions for some exceptional coffees. Like much of the farms around Jinotega coffee is grown in harmony with the natural forest environment. Intercropping of subsistence crops, such as banana, helps keep moisture in the soil, provides additional shade for the coffee and provides sustenance to workers in the field. Other fruit trees such as oranges, limes, avocados, mangos and tangerines are also grown alongside the coffee to provide shade and food for the vibrant local wildlife, whilst bringing in additional revenue for the farm. The forest is home to some precious wood trees such as mahogany, walnut and cedar, all of which are protected under the farm's environmental sustainability program.

With such a variety of natural woodland and intercropping of fruit trees almost 100% of coffee grown on Linda Vista and Alejandra is under shade. Forest cover is important for the coffee because it provides the right conditions for cultivation whilst having added benefits for the surrounding ecosystem. Forest ecosystems reduce daytime air and soil temperatures, preserves humidity, improves soil health, preserves water, and helps prevent soil erosion, whilst providing shelter for coffee trees from the sun and wind. Linda Vista and Alejandra use around 73% of their 51 manzanas for coffee production, while preserving the remaining land as natural forest. There are 14 permanent workers on the farms, with an additional 65 to 85 workers during peak harvest. Workers are paid 170 cordobas per day during harvest and are paid every 15 days, in-keeping with local labour regulations. Permanent workers are provided with meals and are also part of a grain cultivation partnership with the farm in which they can grow their own grains for subsistence or extra income.

Throughout the farms there is a loam clay soil which, with average temperatures of 12-18°C and forest environment provides good growing conditions for coffee. On average Oscar plants 5690 coffee trees per hectare, with intercropping. The main variety cultivated on the farms is Catuai, which makes up roughly 50% of total production. Other varieties grown are Catuai, Pacamara, Parainema and Maracatura, all of which make up around 45% of

production and Java and Maragogype at 5%. The capacity of Linda Vista and Alejandra is 600 quintales of green coffee, which equates to around 400 69kg bags. During harvest selective hand picking is employed to ensure lots are kept separate and coffee is at its optimum ripeness. Once picked cherries are either transported directly to Sajonia Estate in Matagalpa if processed as Natural coffee, or wet-milled on the farm in the Washed processed method. This involves removing the outer skin and pulp from the cherries before wet fermenting the resulting parchment and mucilage for 36 hours. Once processed, wet parchment is washed and delivered to Sajonia for drying on raised beds or in parabolic driers. Whole cherries delivered to Sajonia are processed either as Naturals or Honeys but can also be processed using anaerobic fermentation to increase product diversity and quality. Each lot of coffee delivered to Sajonia Estate is checked for quality, cupped and scored by the cupping and quality team. The mill has also recently developed an open-source mobile software traceability system for producers in which coffee results are inputted and published in real-time, creating immediate feedback for producers and agronomists during harvest.

The relationship with Sajonia and involvement in the Las Fincas Collection project is very important for Martha and Oscar. Recently, due to the political situation in Nicaragua, lack of access to credit and high prices of agronomical inputs have placed a strain on coffee producers. This has been exacerbated by low farm gate prices in the country due to the international coffee market. Although Martha and Oscar are mitigating this by lowering costs, personally handling the administration, accounting and technical assistance on the farm, increasing the diversity and quality of their farm output is essential if they are to reinvest and continue their families coffee farming tradition. Sajonia Estate's support in-the-field and in post-harvesting has enable this farming couple to increase their coffee quality, extend their product range and reach new international markets, connecting with potential buyers.

