

## Alvaro Castillo

## Nicaragua

Farm(s):	Monte Cristo
Region:	Matagalpa
Country:	Nicaragua
Association:	Sajonia Estate
Altitude:	850 masl
Variety:	Parainema, Catimor, Java
Process:	Washed, Honey and Natural sun drying

Monte Cristo farm is participating member 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 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.

When taking a walk through the Monte Cristo Farm you will have three opportunities to meet Alvaro Castillo. Alvaro Castillo Senior who bought the farm 43 years ago in 1977. Then there is Alvaro Castillo, who is the main farmer and Alvaro Castillo Senior's son. Alvaro Castillo Junior is the third generation of Castillo Men to be inducted into coffee farming at Monte Cristo. He helps on the farm along with Alvaro's wife Martha Pineda. Farming at Monte Cristo is a family affair, and practice has proven to make perfect.

The farm has been in operation for 100 years. It was initially set up by the Rios family. As farmers do the Castillo's have imprinted their own vision on both the farming and the processing of coffee. The farm is nestled between regimented rows of teak and wild mountains, lined with Virgin forest. Due to the latter there is an abundance of wildlife that is encouraged on to the farm by the 100 or so acres of coffee trees that are grown under shade.

Depending on the variety you will find between 2,000 and 3,500 trees per hectare. The loam clay soils and the abundant rainfall of 1800 mm per year create excellent conditions for the Parainema, Catimor and Java trees found throughout the farm. The conditions allow for a good deal of income diversity from other crops, cocoa, cassava, bananas, corn, beans and lime trees are all grown in various places on the farm.

Income diversity from other crops such as coconuts & citrus helps the Castillos increase their income and mitigate price fluctuations on the coffee market. Diversifying the coffee that they already produce has the same effect, and in doing so the Monte Cristo farm produces some unique and differentiated cup profiles that obtain better prices. The family have invested in infrastructure, to assist them in post-harvest processing; the farm has raised drying beds, green houses and patios, all of which allow for a great deal of control within the variety of processing techniques.

The final part is community. The Castillos have been farming coffee for two generations, they are part of the community. The twenty-eight permanent staff on the farm are experienced as staff retention is extremely high. The workload of peak season is therefore easily managed even as the labor force increases to ninety individuals. Most importantly the operators of the processes within the farm share

the vision of the Castillo Family, they recognize the importance of innovation and accuracy. The edge that Monte Cristo has is that it's community is aligned in towards creating new coffees, they are driven by potential, buoyed by their successes and learn from their failures. Monte Cristo is an inspirational place.

