

38. BY CHRISTINE COTTRELL



HAVE YOU EVER DREAMED OF LEAVING YOUR CITY LIFESTYLE BEHIND?
THROWING IN YOUR CORPORATE JOB? OPTING FOR A COMPLETE CHANGE OF CAREER?

On trips to Australia's coffee plantations over the years, I hear a dominant theme resounding. Women (along with their husbands/partners) have turned such dreams into reality by choosing to grow coffee. And while such a lifestyle and career change is hard work, they couldn't be happier and healthier, they all say.

So northern NSW, where a lot of these women are living out their dreams, was the perfect place to organise a trip to origin for Australian women working in coffee.

"Why women?", you may well ask?

The reason for the trip was not just to a visit to origin in Australia; it was also about reaching out to women from along the coffee supply chain to commence preliminary discussions about forming an Australian chapter of the International Women's Coffee Alliance (IWCA).

The IWCA is a "global network of women in coffee that advocates for women from seed to cup and provides access to resources and a forum for connection". It was launched in Nicaragua in 2003 and currently has about 20 chapters, mostly from producing countries. Their mission is to "empower women in the international coffee community to achieve meaningful and sustainable lives, and to encourage and recognise

the participation of women in all aspects of the coffee industry".

I was inspired to join IWCA International in 2013 after attending their breakfast function at The SCAA Coffee Event in Boston. Possibly a thousand, mostly women, gathered to hear an inspiring guest speaker explain the problems of educating the next generation of coffee farmers in some countries – the lack of books to facilitate effective teaching and learning, especially for learning English (identified as necessary for those wanting to make a better life for themselves in the coffee industry). What really astounded me though, was to hear that most young people in village schools have no idea what happens to the bags of coffee beans that leave their farms on trucks. While they are active in growing, harvesting and processing coffee from when they are small children, they have no concept of a café or a coffee beverage, even as teenagers.

As an educator myself, I felt a burning need to concern myself with this situation in some way. While a few ideas are swimming around in my head, I haven't figured out exactly what I can do yet. But first, I can rally some support and connect with other like-minded people through the amazing organisation that IWCA is.

By chance earlier this year, Amelia Franklin

emailed me, and we quickly identified a shared vision and decided to get an origin trip and the first IWCA meeting in Australia happening. Three weeks later, a group that included growers, coffee buyers, roasters, baristas, café owners, writers and trainers, mostly from Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane, gathered to connect with each other, share their stories and find out about the IWCA.

The 3-day itinerary we planned included visits to four plantations, a few roasteries, a myriad of cafés and culminated in a two hour meeting on the last day – all fuelled with the spectacular local food and coffee the area has to offer.

Since this is a story about a trip to origin in Australia, I'd like to feature the coffee growers who were part of the group – and how their dreams became reality. Coffee was originally grown in NSW in the late 19th Century, but the industry was restarted in the 1980s.

Joan Dibden and Joy Phelps from Wombah Plantation, both former nurses, decided to grow coffee after they retired. Starting in the 1980s, they are two of the earliest pioneers currently growing coffee in Australia and have a small farm in the area just north of Grafton. Now well into their 80s, they are still running their farm, roasting coffee and managing a café that can accommodate busloads of tourists. The stories



they tell are testimony that growing coffee not only keeps one passionate about life, but fit and healthy as well!

Michelle Clark lived in several remote places, such as Mt Isa and Karratha in Australia and in Papua New Guinea, as a result of her husband's career as a geologist. All the while, Michelle had a Diploma of Horticulture to her name and harboured a dream to grow something one day. They eventually bought a block of land near Bangalow in 1997 and after much deliberation, decided to plant coffee. Bangalow Coffee is sold mainly through the local farmers markets either as roasted beans or beverages.

Rebecca Zentveld has an economics degree and has worked for The Body Shop in the city, where she was inspired by ethical practices. She and her husband moved to the beautiful Newrybar area and got into growing and roasting coffee in 1993. Rebecca prides herself on the award winning brand she has created, as well as being involved in everything along the coffee supply chain from seed to sip.

Sue Needham ran a large and successful marketing and PR agency in Brisbane. Her story

is of getting fed up with the alarm ringing at 6, being out the door by 7 and coming home after dark. So, she and her husband sold up in 2000 and bought Tregeagle Coffee, enabling a more varied and healthier lifestyle and the opportunity to travel overseas with her husband.

Zeta Grealey had an interesting career before she and her husband bought a coffee farm at Carool in the Tweed Valley. She worked in nurse education, in sales and marketing, in media publishing and lastly in PR and advertising, that included quite a glamorous job flying between Hong Kong, Paris and London. After 1994, her story quickly turns to one of learning how to grow coffee and all the hardships involved – and the eventual success of Zeta's Coffee. She doesn't regret the change – except for a few fleeting moments, she says.

There are many more women growing coffee in Australia, and we plan to visit them all and feature their stories too. Look out for our next trips to origin in Australia in subsequent editions.

Because he has worked in the coffee industry for over 40 years and is so passionate about it – and is a super good "bloke", we were

delighted to have Mark Bullivant to share his extensive knowledge of growing coffee in the Northern Rivers region. He gave us a wow of a time at Byron Blue Plantation and at his roastery in Ballina. Also, as the IWCA is not an exclusive alliance for women only, we are keen to demonstrate that male partners, colleagues and friends who support the IWCA mission may be members too.

We have a Facebook page – International Women's Coffee Alliance – Australian Chapter. Please make the connection, "like" our page and ask your friends and colleagues to do the same.

As we want to be inclusive in our future invitations, to that end we are compiling a database of Australian Women Working in Coffee and need your help in doing so.

CONTACT

For more information on future developments in the formation of the IWCA Australian chapter and to register your interest and be on the database, please contact me: Christine Cottrell, Coffee Education Network P. 0407 021 220 E. christine@perfectespresso.com.au

Special mention to the rest of the women who attended this inaugural IWCA gathering, as together they play a small but significant part in Australia's coffee history. Anne Cooper (FTA Specialty Coffee, Melbourne), Anne Newberry (Journeymen Coffee Roasters, Miami), Amelia Franklin (Amelia Franklin Fairtrade Coffee Roasters, Bellingen), Christine Cottrell (Coffee Education Network, Brisbane), Gina di Brita (Numero Uno Coffee, Sydney), Jade Jennings (Veneziano Coffee, Melbourne), Karen Greenlees (Octane Coffee, Brisbane), Kim Stringer (Odd Spot Coffee Trader, Biloela), Laura Poli (Byron Bay Coffee School, Byron Bay), Leigh Carmichael (Mocopan Coffee, Brisbane), Lisa Feeley (Hudsons Coffee, Melbourne), Lucy Ward (Sensory Lab, Melbourne), Mel Maksic (Journeymen Coffee Roasters, Miami), Michaela Gerrard (Grinders, Brisbane), Ruth Franklin (Amelia Franklin Fairtrade Coffee Roasters), Sarah Baker (BeanScene, Melbourne), Zoe Mahoney (Grinders, Queensland).