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LUE TURACO COFFEE FOUNDER WYCLIFFE SANDE CHAMPIONS UGANDAN SPECIALTY ROBUSTA, EMPOWERING FARMERS, AND COMBATING CHILDHOOD HUNGER

Founder Wycliffe Sande was born in a small Ugandan village, where his experience in coffee started at a young age. Launching to the public only four years ago, it is now the first African farmer-owned coffee brand in the United Kingdom, recently securing UK-wide listings in 99 Co-op stores and 142 Waitrose stores.

The 100% speciality Ugandan Robusta has a strong, smooth, and nutty flavour while naturally containing double the amount of caffeine as arabica coffee. Our Food and Drink Editor, Lorraine Copes, met with

Wycliffe to delve into his path into coffee and his future plans.

Tell me about your coffee brand.

Blue Turaco Coffee is more than just a coffee brand; it's a commitment to making speciality Ugandan Robusta coffees accessible to millions of coffee lovers. It tastes amazing - strong but smooth - but it is relatively unknown.

We buy directly from smallholder coffee farmers, including our own farm. This allows us to pay at least

30% more than traditional purchasing routes.

Simultaneously, we fight childhood hunger through our village school's project. Every pack of coffee purchased pays for two school meals. So, when we say it's a powerful coffee with a powerful impact, we really mean it.

When was the business founded?

Blue Turaco Coffee was founded in 2016. It started in a small but intentional way and was launched to the public

in 2020 with passion and a mission driven by the desire to introduce the world to the exceptional taste of Ugandan speciality Robusta to create a model where coffee truly pays in coffee-growing communities.

What inspired your journey into the world of coffee?

I started picking coffee at the age of 8 after the death of my father, initially to pay for school and food. Experiencing firsthand what coffee could do when handled properly, combined with my love for Uganda's Robusta and a belief that coffee can be more than a beverage, is what motivated me to start Blue Turaco Coffee. I aimed to create a positive impact on both coffee farmers and enthusiasts.

I am one of very few coffee brand founders who can say they have seen the power of coffee firsthand. My experience picking coffee at 8 years of age profoundly influenced my work as a smallholder coffee farmer and a coffee brand founder. The potential to elevate Robusta's status globally was my pivotal inspiration.

In what ways have your cultural background influenced your journey or career path?

My Ugandan roots profoundly influence our commitment to sustainable coffee practices, emphasising the importance of giving back to local communities. Losing both parents before the age of 13 shaped my path, surviving through sheer grace and blessings. Belief and a constant understanding of the power of enhanced resilience have so much to do with the paths that I am now on.

What sets your coffee apart as a unique selling point, and how does it distinguish itself from other brands available on our shelves?

Blue Turaco's USP lies in our single-origin Ugandan speciality, Robusta, which offers a distinct flavour profile. Its distinctiveness is due to our speciality processing techniques that are developed at higher altitudes than are traditionally expected for Robusta coffees. We prioritise direct sourcing and trade, ensuring transparent, long-term relationships with fellow smallholder coffee farmers, setting us apart from conventional coffee brands. This allows us to understand the growing challenges and produce exceptional coffee.

Looking back on your journey to date, what is a key lesson you consider invaluable and carry forward in your business endeavours?

This journey has taught me the significance of resilience. Navigating challenges in the coffee industry reinforced the need for adaptability and unwavering commitment to our mission.

And lastly, it has taught me not to wait for perfection; start with what you have and don't be afraid to change course.

What are your perspectives on the perceptions surrounding African coffee?

Over the years, African coffees, like Ethiopian, Kenyan, and Rwandan coffees, have gained a good reputation. Uganda, the second-largest coffee producer in Africa and seventh in the world, hasn't received

the appreciation it deserves. I'm working hard to change the narrative, especially for Uganda's speciality, Robusta, seeking recognition for its unique flavours and the stories behind each bean. Our work is about changing perceptions and showcasing the excellence inherent in African coffees.

What do you envision for the brand five years from now?

In five years, Blue Turaco aims to be a leading global name in speciality Robusta coffee. We envision expanded partnerships, increased sustainability initiatives, and a broader reach. Additionally, we aim to feed more than 12,000 children in Ugandan village schools as part of our efforts to fight childhood hunger, with each bag of coffee sold providing two school lunches.

Finish the sentence: the future of coffee is...

Sustainable and diverse, and I see it becoming increasingly functional with people looking at coffee for a pick-me-up. Hopefully, it's a future where more farmers like me have a direct seat at the table, influencing how we can use coffee to create a lasting positive impact in our communities.

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You can find them on Instagram at @blueturacocoffee