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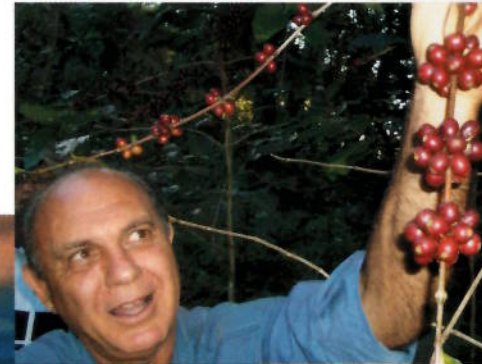
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FRUITS *of* A FOREST FARM

by Alan Mammoser

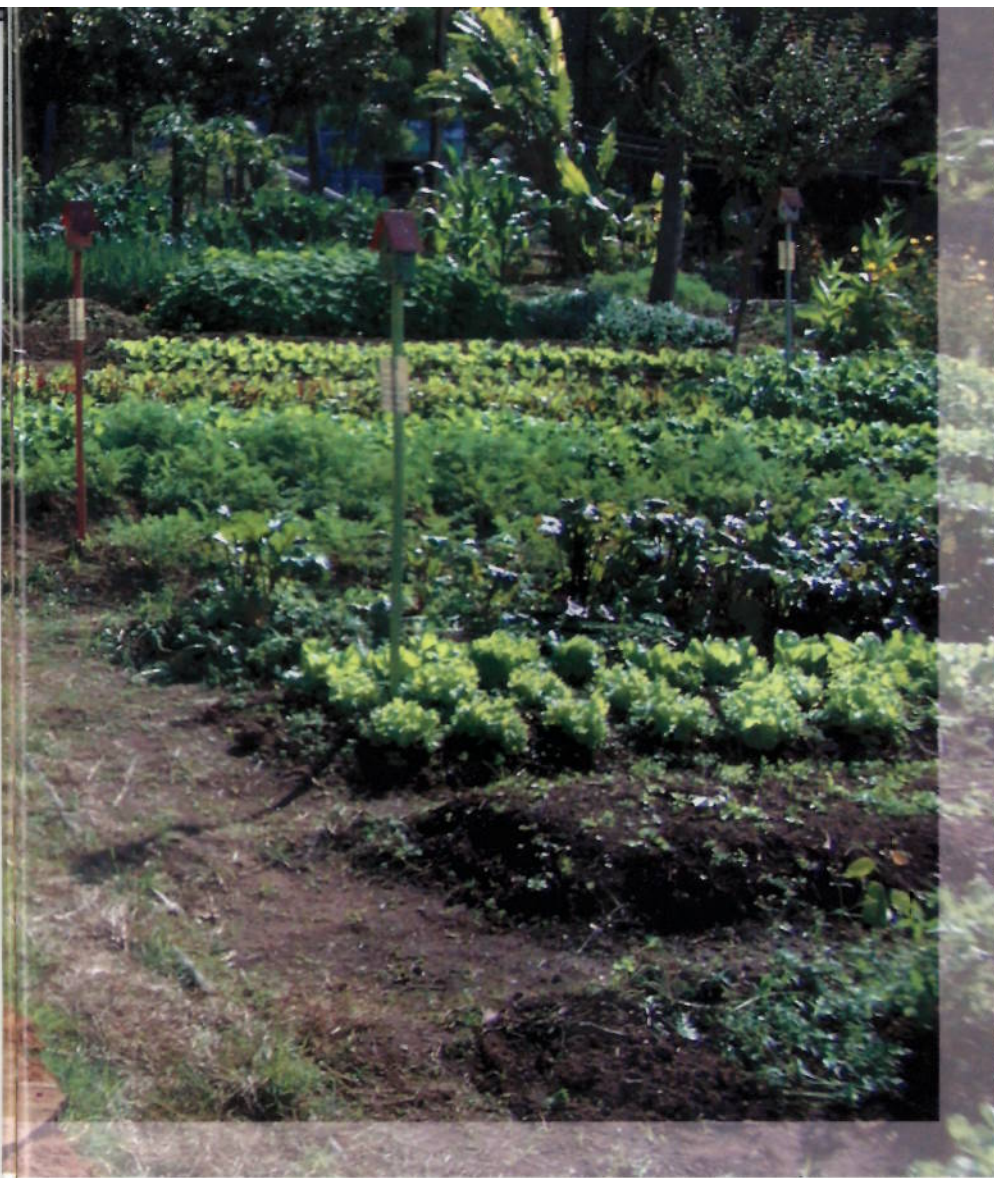
MOCOCA IS A handsome town with elegant French colonial-style homes around a central square. It is the heart of the Mogiana region, once famous for its coffee plantations. Situated in the hill country pressed up against the frontier of São Paulo and Minas Gerais, it is a two-hour drive north of Campinas. Continue driving some ten miles east through green, rolling countryside and you arrive at the village of Igarai, and the entrance to the large estate of Fazenda Fortaleza.

A narrow dirt road makes a winding way to the estate's main house. Sugarcane brushes up against the road on one side, while the other is rough grass pasture. Beyond rise hills covered in thick, knotty forest. They are deep tropical green. The road continues through woods, crosses a muddy stream, and finally arrives at the center of the 1,830-acre plantation. Small worker cottages, bright white with blue doors, enclose a grassy yard. The 1850s-era main house, the *sede*, sits further back behind a stone fence, flowers, and a row of

eucalyptus trees. Huge blacktop drying terraces, two football fields in length, await the coffee harvest.

Today the *sede* still reminds people that a plantation house in Brazil was taken from nature itself. Resting upon a stone foundation, the house has a pastel orange facade topped with a red tile roof. A single row of tall, curtainless, plate-glass windows are framed by simple wood shutters. The great wooden front door is left wide open on summer days. Warm air enters, rises, and quickly cools in the

OWNERS OF A PRIVATE ESTATE IN SÃO PAULO, BRAZIL, ARE NURTURING A VITAL COMMUNITY THAT LINKS HUMANS AND NATURE WITH SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE



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Above: Farm manager Claudia Meirelles Davis and garden caretaker Joaquim Teodoro, far right and left respectively, take visitors on a tour of Fazenda Fortaleza's organic vegetable garden; below right: the plantation's 1850s-era main house was built from nature itself, with tropical hardwoods from the surrounding forest

shadowy hallway and rooms, where ceilings are fifteen feet high and the deep polish of wide plank floors shows the dark grain of tropical woods. The house's long, heavy dining table was taken from the wood of a single tree. Recently, the stump of this ancient tree was found submerged in a nearby pond. The land behind the house slopes down through a sprawling orchard of fruit trees, where the shrieking *maritaca*, a green-feathered bird smaller to its parrot cousin, can often be heard.

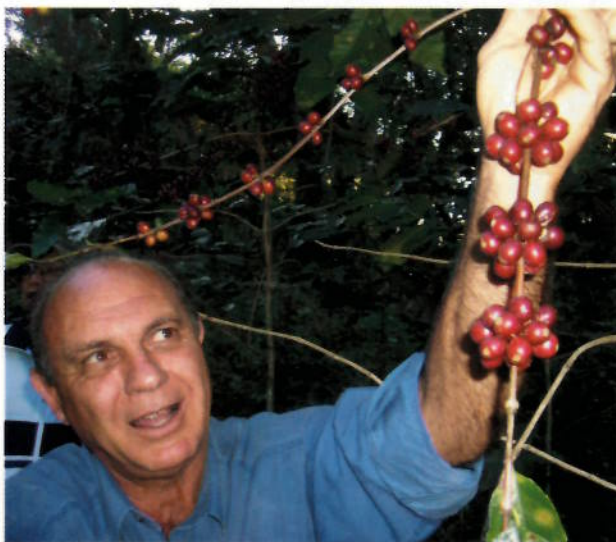
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THIS FOREST-GROWN
COFFEE WILL BE MUCH BETTER,
FOR YOU, FOR YOUR FAMILIES, AND FOR

OUR BUSINESS.

YOU WILL WORK
IN THE SHADE,
NOT IN THE HOT
SUN, AND OUR
COMPANY WILL
PROFIT



Silvia Barretto Croce was born in Mococa. She spent many days of her youth on the Fazenda Fortaleza and surrounding estates, to which her family would go for summer and winter vacations. She has fond memories, which she now recalls from her Highland Park, Illinois, home.

"When I was a child growing up in the 1960s, the region was full of life. Many people were visiting the estates during vacations. Families and their friends got together for lunch or for dinner, or after dinner, sitting around those long tables. They went out in big groups on horseback, going from farm to farm on long rides called *cavalgadas*. And there was much celebration, with horse-riding competitions, singing, and serenades. I would go out in the morning on all-day rides, following my older cousins.

After a financial crisis in the 1980s, João Pereira Lima Neto, neighbor and fellow coffee grower, above, made the dramatic change to natural, or shade-grown coffee, right, by eliminating all pesticides and fertilizers and allowing the forest to reenter the coffee areas. At Fazenda Fortaleza, above right, harvested coffee beans are spread out on the terrace for drying. The plantation's signature coffee brands, available green or roasted, are packaged for sale, opposite





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"There was always a lot going on in July, during the winter vacation. That's the time of the coffee harvest. Of course all of the estates had dairy cows. In winter the pastures are dry, so they had to really show their skill in producing milk. They had competitions to see which estate had the highest production of milk. Every week there were two or three farms to visit, when they would measure the milk production from those farms. And the host families had big parties with barbecue. It was good to be a breeder in those days. They were very efficient, and they had a lot of pride in their farms.

"You see," Silvia explains, "coffee goes well with dairy herds. The cows' manure gets mixed with the husk of the coffee bean, which makes a good fertilizer for the fields. Maybe," she adds with a laugh, "this was the start of *café com leite!*"

Silvia can trace her family in Brazil back to the 1600s. Her forebears were planters in the northeast during the long sugar era. Some of them migrated south to São Paulo in the late nineteenth century when the coffee era began. Her grandfather, Francisco Muniz Barretto, came to Mococa from the state of Sergipe in the northeast. He had intended to study medicine in Rio de Janeiro, but he became ill en route and was sent by relatives to Mococa to recover.

He stayed, married, began an import business and then a bank. His main customers were the local farmers who came to town to sell their coffee.

Silvia thinks that Fazenda Fortaleza was the first farm that her grandfather bought, sometime around 1910. He acquired more estates through Depression-era defaults and over the years built a business empire, with banks, factories, and large estates throughout Brazil. Although the fortune is now dispersed among many descendants, the townspeople in Mococa still fondly remember the Barretto family's link to Fazenda Fortaleza.

"The way I experienced Mococa, it was still a very rich city, one of the most developed in the state," she says. "Coffee was still a big business then and many prominent people came from there. Renato Costa Lima, who owned the neighboring Fazenda São Bento, became president of the Brazilian Coffee Institute (IBC). He marketed Brazilian coffee throughout the world."

When Silvia inherited the estate in 2002, much of the way of life that she remembers



©CLAUDIA MEIRELLES DAVIS

from her childhood had disappeared. The coffee industry had long since declined, and the dairy along with it. "Today the area is totally changed. It's very sad. Many of the original families still own their estates, but they've lost their former attachment to the land. Many of them just lease it out for sugar growing."

Silvia turned the management of Fazenda Fortaleza over to her husband, Marcos Croce. Marcos, a São Paulo native who built a successful import business in Chicago, took it over as a passionate project. He renamed it Fazenda Ambiental Fortaleza (FAF) and dedicated this "environmental" estate to revitalizing the community. But his vision transcends mere recovery of the past. Marcos wants to create a new inclusive community for the estate's workers, family, and friends while transitioning to an organic farming methodology. Above all, he believes, FAF must become a place of learning about the human community and nature.

Marcos does not want the estate to become solely focused on specialty coffee, or simply to evolve into a bed and breakfast with agro-tourism. He talks constantly with his workers and with his managers about how to create a diverse organic system of many crops to sustain the estate's livelihood. They have not reached their goal yet, but with each passing season they are learning.

"We have a complete farm here," says estate manager Claudia Meirelles Davis. "The fruit trees, the fields, and the garden follow their cycles, and our work continues throughout the year."

In 2004, Marcos invited Claudia and her husband, Nelson Davis, to take over as resident managers of FAF. They left good jobs

Alan Mammoser is a regional planner in Chicago, Illinois, who also writes about urban and environmental issues. In 2004, he received a U.S. State Department fellowship to work at the regional planning agency EEMPLASA in São Paulo, Brazil.



in Chicago to come. Claudia had studied at a prestigious business school there, while Nelson worked for years as a computer systems manager. They renovated one of the worker cottages for their home and decided to live without television. It was a major life-style transformation, and they love it.

Both have an early bedtime at FAF, since they wake up at half past five. They don't mind, as there's not much to do after sunset, when the estate falls into deep quiet and darkness. Then the night air is filled with the clean scent of eucalyptus trees and

the thick, sweet smell of the *dama da noite* bush. Owls and bats swoop through the darkness, while the black sky glows with the bright spectrum of the Milky Way. First gleams of sunrise reveal white mist lying over the hills. Then Claudia and Nelson head over to the estate's office, on one corner of the long drying terraces, to meet the arriving workers at seven.

"It's important to be here when they come," says Claudia, "so they know we care about their work on this place." About forty-five workers arrive daily, with twice that number during the coffee harvest in

June to September. They come by truck from nearby villages and from twelve families living on the estate. They're in the fields all day, with a one-hour lunch at ten and a half-hour coffee break at two in the afternoon. Quitting time comes at four, and Claudia pays another hour for their transportation. "I may not be the best boss," she says, "because I care for them like a mother."

Much of the morning discussion between Claudia and Nelson deals with where to send the workers. It is really a discussion about the land that carries on

TODAY THE AREA IS TOTALLY CHANGED.

throughout the day. They talk about fields across the estate, making plans for plantings and harvestings, sensitive to timing and the seasons. A major concern is always for the *talhães*, the coffee fields, which cover about one-seventh of the estate. They must get the grass cut down in the rainy summer months of January to March. The workers first let cattle into each *talhão* (steers enthusiastically eat thick grass and disdain coffee plants). Later the workers go in with scythes to cut down the high grass around the plants. The cut grass goes to the dairy where, with the resulting manure, it becomes a basis for compost. This compost goes back to the *talhães*.

They are gaining intimate knowledge of what comes in the cycle of the seasons, the various months of the fruits' ripening, and the long annual saga of the coffee. Learning occurred quickly when, very soon after their arrival, the long-time estate foreman fell ill and went on leave. Instead of appointing a new foreman, Claudia and Nelson began cultivating new leadership among several of the workers. Alcindo was given charge of the coffee, while Alexandre took responsibility for the bananas and bees. Marquinhos, who first took care of the dairy and cattle, now shows leadership across many areas of the farm.

At first the workers resisted Marcos's ideas, and some of them left when he came. But the younger ones remained and gradually began to understand his concept of organic and sustainable agriculture. It is much more than freedom from chemicals; it means that all parts of the estate are drawn together and made interdependent. But the linchpin is the people.

"When I first began here three years ago, they [the workers] would not even look at me," Marcos recalls. "They walked around with their heads bent down. It was terrible. People were depressed. And everything was being brought in from the outside. They were spending all their money at the

MANY OF THE ORIGINAL FAMILIES STILL OWN THEIR ESTATES, BUT . . . MANY JUST LEASE IT OUT FOR SUGAR GROWING



grocery store, eating out of cans and drinking lots of soda pop—when we have all these fruit trees around here!

"Sustainable agriculture means sustainable for the person, for the family," he says. "First, we seek a whole person, a person totally well and alive.

requires a person who eats well, because a healthy body leads to a healthy mind. Then, we care for the family. We want families in which each person is fulfilled. This is the basis for our community and for our business."

Marcos believes each person on the estate should feel part of an effort to produce healthy food and to restore the land and forest. But he acknowledges that the human element is the hardest part. "Getting them to think for themselves, to share ideas, and take initiative on the estate, that is the toughest challenge," he says.

Yet the estate is undergoing a remarkable transformation. Thick stands of woodland now cover once-bare hillsides, and more is emerging across large areas of the estate. This forest growth crowds around pastures and the fields of coffee and corn. Reforestation on FAF makes a small step toward reforestation of a region that once was covered with the great Atlantic Rainforest.

Marcos's mentor for the reforestation is João Pereira Lima Neto, who owns the neighboring Fazenda Santo Antônio, which has been in his family since the 1860s. The estate entered a period

of financial crisis in the late 1980s, and João made some dramatic changes. He saved costs by stopping all use of herbicides, pesticides, and fertilizers. Then he allowed the forest to gradually reenter the coffee areas, creating an *agro-floresta*. His production went way down at first, but his Japanese buyers noticed that his coffee



Well covered for working under the tropical sun, farm employees cut back abundant high grasses during the rainy season, above, while a raised bed in the vegetable garden shows neatly tended rows, opposite. In addition to coffee, FAF's other farm activities, like beekeeping and the dairy, produce honey, jams, and a variety of cheeses, top

was tasting better. The Japanese continue buying, and his costs are now much lower, although his forest-grown *café natural* has not yet reached former production levels.

During this transformation, João came to understand coffee within the forest system. He takes any interested visitor on a long walk over his estate, pointing out many trees and bushes, describing their behavior and their good or ill effects upon coffee. He reminds visitors that the coffee tree has its origins in the forests of Africa. Whenever he goes to neighboring FAF he likes to visit one hilltop where a giant *jatobá* grows. This magnificent tree, of thick trunk and far-spreading branches, shades the coffee plants below, enabling them to grow twice as tall as surrounding unshaded plants.

João describes the patient stages required to create an *agro-floresta* in the coffee fields. First come the fast-growing plants that thrive in the sun, plants such as the bush *mamona*, the soft-wooded tree *capoeira branca*, the large *guapuruvu*, and the beautiful *sibipiruna*, whose thick green canopy gives forth a profusion of yellow flowers. Such trees provide the shade for the secondary forest, which emerges with the tall *cedro*, the fruit-giving *pitanga* and *jaboticaba*, and many other trees, including coffee itself. The trees are planted or arise naturally within the *talhões*, while workers plant bananas, papaya, manioc, and vegetable crops amid the rows of coffee. João wants cattle, chickens, sheep, and other animals to enter as well and provide their natural fertilizer. Thus a forest system is gradually built up, one very favorable to coffee and requiring much less work.

João gained his knowledge through some reading but mostly through careful observation of nature. His thinking is influenced by ideas of vitalism and biodynamics. He believes the right arrangement of plant life and animal life creates a vital system of



information and energy flow, and that a diverse *agro-floresta* fosters a rising supply of energy. Of course the human role is central in an *agro-floresta*. A person enters the living forest not as a worker who expends energy to control it, but as a companion who both uses and contributes resources. It is quite unlike conventional mono-crop agriculture, which merely consumes energy and exhausts it.

Marcos has absorbed much of this thinking and he shares it freely with the workers. One Saturday afternoon he calls them together for a general meeting. It is a warm summer afternoon in January. Loud bugs are buzzing by and a toucan flies swiftly overhead. Heavy purple-gray clouds gather in the western sky, signaling the daily approach of rain. The workers gather in chairs under shade trees. "We are creating something different here," Marcos says. "This forest-grown coffee will be much better, for you, for your families, and for our business. You will work in the shade, not in the hot sun, and our company will profit.

"But," he continues, "I need your help to make this happen. I can't figure out how to do this by myself. You know this land better than me, so you need to come up with good ideas and implement them."

Silvia believes that a lot of what is occurring today on the estate is a restoration of knowledge that the workers had in the past. "When I was growing up, we had orchards, vegetable gardens, chickens, just about everything on the estate. And the workers were planting beans, squash, corn, and other crops in the coffee fields. But they started using chemical applications in the 1970s. The workers were aware of the harm from the sprays, so they stopped the plantings and the farm became more of a monoculture."

That's when they began buying everything from the grocery, even imported apples, and their knowledge of the local foods declined. "When we started here, we told the workers that we're going to produce more food from what is here on the farm. Now we buy organic sugar and rice.

WE BELIEVE
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And we're rediscovering how to make good jams and preserves," she says.

Marcos visits FAF for just a few days every couple months. He takes high-energy walks over the estate or crosses it on horseback, giving directives even while he tries to understand its workings. Long discussions with João, Nelson, and Claudia yield agreed-upon strategies to raise the estate's profitability. They recently began roasting, packaging, and marketing their coffee under their own label, *Natureza*.

Marcos wants FAF to become a place of learning. He often directs the building of log rings in various sites around the estate. These "council rings" serve as places for sitting and discussion, potential field classrooms where workers share ideas and experiences. "I want each person here to become creative, to become a master of something, and then to communicate that knowledge. Then we will have a kind of school here, a school of FAF," he says.

He enjoys hosting visitors. He has brought in high school kids from Highland Park and food science students from the University of Illinois. Many visitors have never been so close to working land before, but Marcos wants them to experience more than just a weekend on a farm. "People come here and they see how food is made," he says. "They see the food come to the table and that it is good, it's fulfilling. Then, they begin to get a sense of how all of this is interrelated, the people, their activities, and the land."

Ultimately, he wants guests to learn "that man and nature are together, that all is interconnected in a community, and that what we do on the land has impacts and returns to us. The important point about this place is to spread the seed, the seed of sustainability."

Perhaps some day, FAF and the nearby Fazenda Santo Antônio could form the backbone of an expanding region of sustainable agriculture. Many estates working together to create *agro-floresta* would begin to transform the landscape around Mococa, gradually replacing some of the lost Atlantic Rainforest. Of course it depends upon whether Marcos and João can convince other landowners of their ideas. The prospect is exciting, although the biodiversity of the original forest would take centuries to reproduce.

João has a quiet confidence about the possibility of people and the forest living together sustainably. "This is the Atlantic Rainforest," he asserts, speaking of the

agro-floresta. "But it is a forest created by man for man's needs. The original Atlantic Rainforest was created by animals and birds carrying seeds for their own needs. Just so, we are creating this forest for our needs," he says.

Conservationists tend to support this perspective. Mario Mantovani, director of the São Paulo-based advocacy group SOS Mata Atlântica, has visited FAF numerous times. He believes that effective conservation allows for, even requires, human use of the forest. "We believe a forest used is safer than a forest not used," he says. "Because simple protection is very difficult. Governments should create parks to protect the forest. But we've thrown out the word 'protection.' Instead we're working with private landowners on useful ways to conserve the forest. And we're pleased with the results in many areas of Brazil."

Whenever Marcos visits the estate, he enjoys taking walks to a small woodland in its very center. It's a fragment of the virgin forest, which for reasons unknown was

never cut down. A small path leads into this hidden realm of thick foliage, an ancient world of shadow pervaded by the sound of streams and a cacophony of birds. This forest is filled with many species of plants and trees, including the native palm *jussara*. Upon one edge stands a gigantic tree, a *jequitibá*, perhaps more than three hundred years old, its vine-covered trunk thick like a redwood, its high branches breaking open far above the other trees. Water drops fall in a rush from its heights, down through the broad palm leaves.

"It gives you a sense of what they had to cut through when they came, those first settlers back in the 1850s. Imagine the tremendous work required to build this estate," he muses. Similarly, the work of building the Fazenda Fortaleza continues, now through a new dedication to creating a vital, interconnected community. ■



Helping to reforest a pond edge, José Aparecido Lozano, head of the farm's reforestation and seed collection area, and visitor Manoela Fagundes carefully tend a new transplant, opposite. Sitting among shade trees, these cottages, above, home to some of the plantation's workers, were refurbished when Silvia and Marcos took over in 2002