

## CHAPTER 7: GABIADJI AND SAN PEDRO

They continued South from the water falls to Gabiadji, a village just north of the city of San Pedro. Here, they visited COOPAGA, one of the first Fair Trade Certified™ cooperatives in Côte d'Ivoire.



Left, a drying shed. Most cocoa drying is done directly under the sun. This shed represents a high-tech method of drying, using some very expensive plywood. There is obviously a serious squandering of space. It would help to have a solar-powered fan to remove the moist air, dropping the relative humidity. Also, one entire wall could be black concrete or a rock wall painted black in order to absorb heat and radiate it back.

Middle, using an instrument for measuring moisture. You just stab the probe into the bag. When the middle-man brings in the cocoa, the buyer needs to know the moisture level of the beans in order to determine how long to dry the beans.

Right, a sample page from a book that details the farmer's product.

- G or grainage is 106, which means 106 to a weight of 100 grams.
- Moisies means “moldy”. At 2%, it's not too bad. Moldiness give chocolate a mushroomy taste.
- Ard means “Ardoisé” or slaty. This means smooth like slate, an indicator of insufficient fermentation. Unfermented means that the anthocyanins or purple pigments are retained, giving the chocolate a bitter taste. Chocolate companies counter bitterness with sugar and milk powder.
- Plates or flat indicates beans that are young or un-developed.
- Mitées: containing bugs or mites.
- Ger: means “germinées” or sprouted. None in this case
- Violets: or purple indicating insufficient fermentation causing retention of the purple anthocyanin pigments

Although one can't see it on the picture, there is a “refoulé” written in red and circled. This means “refused”. The farmer would have had to take his crop down the road to San Pedro, where he would find a willing buyer. Who buys inferior beans? Anyone making Easter Eggs, Easter Bunnies, and any other chocolate where milk powder, sugar, and vanilla are used to hide flaws.



The three continued south to the port of San Pedro, which is the major exporting port for Côte d'Ivoire for wood and for cocoa beans. Since Côte d'Ivoire is the world's biggest cocoa exporter, San Pedro is very busy. As they entered the city, they stopped at a gas station. Tom looked over the stone wall and saw this factory. A man opened a window in the nearby office building and said, "You don't have to peer over the wall! Come to the entrance and visit us!"

So, they did! And Tom made friends with the owner, Ali Lakiss, who is the president of the corporation, the fourth largest exporter of cacao in Côte d'Ivoire. Below left is the entrance. Below right are export bags of cacao waiting for a customer.



Below, left, sampling a new truckload of beans. The sampler plunges a stainless steel tube into 5 parts of the bag—the four corners and the middle. The beans are dumped in the blue bucket, which is taken to the lab. Below, right, is the drying oven. Bags that have been purchased by Saf Cacao are sorted by moisture, then dried in the oven if they are wetter than 7%, which is most of the bags.



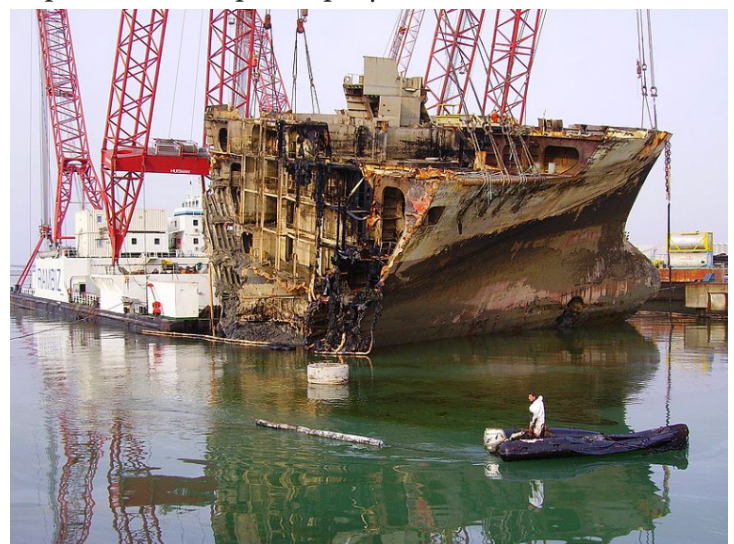




Above, left, the lab where samples are brought. They fill out a form and the office makes an offer to the Traitant who has brought in the truck of beans. Above, right, Saf Cacao personnel offloading bags and sorting them by moisture content once the office has come to terms with the Traitant.



The Rokia Delmas on its next-to-last voyage. It traveled from San Pedro to Spain, Portugal, France, and finally Holland. In its hold were logs of African hardwood. In the containers lining the deck were cacao beans destined for chocolate factories in the ports of call. Below, left, is a picture of the ship's demise taken from a beach on the famous French island, *Isle de Ré* on October 21 and right, a piece of the ship cut up a year after the accident.







Dan, Tom, and Evariste left the port and drove to the top of the hill overlooking it. Here they met an old friend of my Dd's, an Italian gentleman who had crossed the Sahara years before and made a life in San Pedro, where he eventually became the sales rep for a large European logging firm, married an Ivoirian, and had a family. Because of the ongoing political unrest, his wife and children had moved to Southern France, where they also owned a home.

Tom learned that Côte d'Ivoire earned a lot of foreign exchange selling off the very forests where cacao is now planted. This man was one of the main players in the deforestation of Côte d'Ivoire.

After the visit, the threesome drove east toward Abidjan along the coast road. A very lovely drive, however, was marred by an accident just east of San Pedro. A body was lying in the middle of the lane, and it had been there since 5 AM, when the young woman was hit while riding her bicycle. There were about 100 people standing around.

Tradition mandates that you not drive on but get out of your car and stand at the side of the road. They couldn't afford to do that so they drove slowly for several hundred feet in order to show respect for the dead. Dan's airplane flight to Kenya was that evening.

After Dan left, Evariste and Tom left for Grand Bassam the next day. This is the site of the original capital--from 1893 to 1896, when a bout of yellow fever killed hundreds and caused the French authorities to move the capital away from the lagoon to Bingerville. Grand Bassam continued as a major port until Abidjan replaced it in the 1930s. During the four decades, the French built quite an attractive city that is mainly a tourist site today.



Evariste and Tom started by enjoying a lunch of *poisson à l'Abidjanaise*, made from fish caught locally in the lagoon that extends along about a third of the shoreline of Côte d'Ivoire.





Left, some parts of Grand Bassam are used by the federal government. By the looks of it, this building is used and kept in good shape. Right, stone monument commemorating the arrival in 1895 of the first missionaries, Pères Alexandre Hamard and Emile Bonhomme



Left, the statue comemorites the many Europeans who died of yellow fever caused by the lagoon's enormous mosquito population. Middle, a line of warehouses, obviously well constructed and well maintained. Right, a beautiful old church.





The Ebrié Lagoon, which extends 100 km along the coast, extends to the west of Abidjan and just to the east of Grand Bassam. It is on average 4 km wide and 5 meters deep and is fed by the Comoë River and drains into the ocean at the Vridi Canal. The lagoon supplies a good part of the local fish.



Before the death of Houphouët-Boigny, when the French and Belgians considered their former colonies fun places to visit, Grand Bassam was quite an artist colony and a great place to sun-bathe. There are still many artists here who represent some of the best weaving, sculpture, and painting to be found in Côte d'Ivoire

Tom and Evariste drove back to Abidjan, that evening. On the way into Abidjan, they were pulled over by the police, who demanded to be paid \$50 because the little wooden trinkets purchased in Grand Bassam represented valuable artwork. They stood around for half an hour and my Dad was able to bargain them down to \$25, which Tom gratefully paid.

In the wee hours of the morning, when flights are scheduled to leave sub-Saharan Africa, Tom departed.