



Coffee for the Masses!

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Stuart Eunson, a 32-year-old Boston native, initially came to China in 1988 as a student, but before he knew it, he and a couple of friends had brewed up a get rich quick scheme. Their idea was to import coffee and make their fortune selling it to the tea-weary expat community in Beijing. "I was responsible for the market survey that said we'd be rich in six months," admits Eunson.

That rose-tinted market survey led to the birth of Arabica Coffee Roasters in 1994, a wholly foreign-owned company that imported high quality coffees from around the world to China. But Eunson and his partners soon discovered that expat coffee drinkers were a fickle bunch and many were devoted to drinking a coffee brand they were familiar with from their own country. So Eunson and his partners turned to the hotel and restaurant market and began the difficult process of building a client base.

Three years later the trio found they were far from rich and worn out by the endless problems they faced, which included constantly changing customs procedures, cash flow issues, and hassles with the local tax bureau. With the knowledge that their fledgling business was not bringing in enough to support three expatriates, Eunson's two other partners bowed out of the day-to-day operations and went to work for multinationals operating in China.

Eunson soon found himself overwhelmed with the responsibility of running a struggling business in China on his own. "Why did I decide to do this?" he ponders. "I ask myself that question when I get out of bed every day!" But eight years and millions of coffee beans later the young entrepreneur admits he is still stimulated by the challenge of coming up with solutions for the unthinkable situations he constantly encounters. Just last summer he had to scramble to find a new office and production facility when given eight days notice that Arabica's previous location was to be torn down to make way for Beijing's Olympic facelift. "They parked the bulldozers out front just to let us know they were serious," recalls Eunson.

And although Arabica Roasters still hasn't amassed the fortune Eunson and his friends originally envisioned, the company does a respectable US\$500,000 in annual sales and have expanded their operations to Shanghai. They roast and process all of the beans they import at their Beijing plant and sell to locations as remote as Kaxgar and Lhasa. In the future, Eunson hopes to increase sales of their top-grade java throughout the country and also expand their business to the export of green beans from the growing industry of China's coffee crop.

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