CAFE CONNECTIONS: A Service-Learning Study Abroad Class in Costa Rica
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Finca la Bella Overview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Finca la Bella Designs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>Alvaro’s Organic Farm Tour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.</td>
<td>Finca Lobo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>La Bella Tica</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.</td>
<td>2009 Café Connection Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>Credits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>Contact Information</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During the summer of 2009, Fanning Institute faculty created and led a service-learning component for the College of Environment and Design’s Costa Rica study abroad program. Using the community-based asset development protocol developed through Project Riverway, eleven graduate and undergraduate landscape architecture students were able to provide significant design assistance to three families in the Finca la Bella (Beautiful Farm) community seeking to increase eco-tourism on their lands. It is important to know how vital tourism is to these families as it provides significant income, and, just as important, allows them to continue a multi-generational tradition of working the land.

Students created new resources such as pamphlets, maps, and landscape designs to help increase the tourism on each farm through improved wayfinding, inexpensive publicity, and simple, cost-effective site improvements. In addition, a bilingual web site has been constructed that tells the story of Finca la Bella and of these three families and their farms. While these products may seem to be fairly simple tools, they were created in response to the needs and requests of the Finca la Bella farmers: we listened to what they needed and responded.

The integration of service-learning at the Costa Rican campus allowed the students to gain a unique and important experience that has transformed the way they see their individual skills and use their academic training, and we at the Fanning Institute look forward to continuing our partnership with the College of Environment and Design as our program continues to grow for years to come.
Finca La Bella is a 49-hectare (122-acre) community farming project located in the town of San Luis (Monteverde, Costa Rica). This farming and conservation project is made up of 24 families, each with its own ~1-hectare parcel. Approximately half of Finca La Bella is under conservation as forest preserve.

The community of San Luis had been struggling with issues of land tenure for years when Finca La Bella began. Huge tracts of land were held by just a few people, and the village was suffering economically, socially, and environmentally as a result. One Quaker woman, Ann Kriebel, threw herself into the movement, and worked closely with the San Luis community for improvement. She died an untimely death before the Finca La Bella project was formed, and in gratitude for her work, the farm now bears the official name “Asosación Finca La Bella Ann Kriebel”.

Finca La Bella was initiated in the early 1990s through the joint efforts of a local Quaker group, a U.S. non-profit organization, a cooperative in the nearby town of Santa Elena (CoopeSantaElena), and concerned citizens in San Luis. The Quakers, who settled in the Monteverde area in the mid-20th century, were especially instrumental in creating the Finca La Bella farming community.

The U.S. non-profit group provided initial funds to purchase Finca La Bella from its previous owner, who had used the land for
conventional coffee production and pasture. The title to the land was originally held by CoopeSantaElena, and was transferred in 1999 to a local higher education center called the Monteverde Institute, which still holds the title. From the beginning, parcels of land in the Finca La Bella community were offered to landless residents of San Luis. Those interested were accepted by a committee and signed a legal contract entitling them to manage the plots for 25 years. These leases are renewable and can pass from generation to generation by renewing the 25-year lease, although the land may never be sold. Should a family choose to leave Finca La Bella, they would be paid for any improvements (house, barn, greenhouse, etc.) and the land would become available to another qualified applicant, also selected by the committee.

Finca La Bella has many guidelines, mainly to protect the environment and keep the community functioning smoothly. A 20-page legal document outlines the organization’s mission of sustainable use. It underscores the responsibility of all humans to protect the environment, for quality of life now and to preserve a resource base for future generations. Common resources listed within the document include biodiversity, the forest, potable water and streams, and the soil. Those living within the community may build a house, shed, or workshop; raise small animals; and cultivate land, with the condition that they adhere to the guidelines regarding sustainable use. With the agreement of the association, which includes four community members and representatives from the other founding groups, families can develop roads, potable water systems, electrical systems, and tourism.
T-shirt
Evolution of coffee, from bean to cup.

More proposed entryway signs for Finca La Bella.
Greenhouse and coffee nursery, Finca La Bella.

Improved wastewater treatment concept. Biological processes and gravity flow are used to breakdown and filter wastewater, eliminating potential environmental contamination.
The trapiche sits under a covered open air building overlooking a stunning view of the Gulf of Nicoya. He walks visitors through the process of growing, harvesting and processing sugar cane into a variety of products including molasses, tapa dulce and guaro (cane liquor). Also included in the tour is a look at his vegetable garden and a visit in his home where hand-made crafts are sold.
T-Shirt design with logo.

View of vegetable garden.

Proposed entry signage for Alvaro’s Organic Farm Tour.
Proposed placement of a traditional oven for fiestas.

Alvaro stands by his 100 plus year old restored trapiche (sugarcane mill)
Alvaro and his daughter at their farm standing in a field of tiquisque.

The class poses with Alvaro at Alvaro's Organic Farm; behind is a view to the Gulf of Nicoya.

Proposed entry signage.
Finca Lobo, home of Gilberth Lobo and family introduces visitors to life in rural Costa Rica through his deep knowledge of the history of the San Luis Valley. On his tour, you see coffee growing on steep terraced hillsides and can try sugar cane juice squeezed by hand in his hand-cranked mill. The design team recommends that Gilberth add bench seating and signage to the circular area where he begins the tour.
Proposed entry to Finca Lobo

View looking out from the home of Gilberth of Finca Lobo
Vignettes of Finca Lobo.
A) Proposed bench seating for the presentation area of the tour.
B) Vignette of the greenhouse.
C) Vignette of the home of Gilberth Lobo.
D) Vignette of visitors juicing sugar cane.
Oldemar has a successful coffee farm where he offers tours and operates a processing facility. The coffee he processes and roasts is sold under his brand name “La Bella Tica.” He sells the coffee in shops in Santa Elana and from his home. He has had so much success that he is ready to expand his offerings to include a small cafe with a pizza oven. Being adjacent to the main road and the first farm in Finca La Bella, his location is ideal for this. He also requested that a worm composting system be designed to help him make compost from the organic material created in the coffee processing.

Above, Oldemar measures coffee for sale in the processing facility. Below, Melany poses with the traditional pilon, a device used to process coffee. Today a machine is used instead making the process faster and more efficient.
It is often hard for tourists to find Finca La Bella. This map highlights the route from Santa Elena to the farm.
Site of the proposed Cafe La Bella Tica. From the left, garage, coffee processing facility and home.

Elevations of a proposed renovation of the existing garage into a cafe and store.

Plan view of proposed Cafe La Bella Tica. This plan removes the garage and adds a simple building adjacent to the coffee processing facility. Outdoor seating extends the space into the open air.
Front elevation. This illustration shows the front facade of the cafe with its gracious windows and decorative signage. The roof will be made of a single plane of tin draining to the rear like that of the coffee processing facility.

Rear elevation shows a covering of vines to naturalize the appearance of the cafe.

Vignette of the front of the home and patio seating area of Cafe La Bella Tica.

Side elevation indicates the slanted tin roof, front signage and vehicular access.
Vignette of the patio seating area, decorative vines and looking into Cafe La Bella Tica.

Plan view of patio seating area and possibility of vehicle access to coffee processing facility.
This low cost vermicompost system is designed for ease of construction using common building materials and techniques. The lid is made of corrugated zinc and the structure of solid reinforced concrete. The bottom slopes toward a drain removing unwanted liquid. The structure is multipurpose, it can be used for vermiculture or, if fitted with a watertight valve, for water storage and aquaculture.
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