

Inc.

The Magazine for Growing Companies

How I Got the Idea

from the founders of
**Vosges chocolate,
Warby Parker,
Tatcha, Lyft,
Kayak, Toms,
and more**

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**Building
a better
website**

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"We have the potential to save billions of human lives and trillions of animal lives." —**UMA VALETI**, co-founder of Memphis Meats



The founders leading the revolution in lab-grown meat

World Without Slaughter

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**TACKLING
POLITICS IN
THE OFFICE**

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☉ Tasting Room

Mokhtar Alkhanshali, founder and CEO of Port of Mokha (far left in the foreground), tastes coffee from farmers in the Bani Ismail region of Yemen in November 2014.

know what I was getting myself into.

For every farm in Yemen growing coffee, there were seven growing khat. I thought that if I could pay them a higher price, and find the right buyers, I could help them replace this drug. I went across the country for more than four months visiting farmers. I got malaria and tapeworms; I lost 40 pounds.

I brought back samples from 21 farms. Nineteen failed basic standards tests, but two were rated by a coffee-quality expert, Willem Boot, as very good specialty-grade beans. He said it was coffee of potentially extraordinary quality. So I went back to Yemen in mid-2014, to the two areas where the coffee was rated highest, and sent back more samples—but they were horrible because of the way they were picked and sorted. I realized I had to slow down and put into place more rigorous protocols. I also had to have vertical integration so the quality would be good. I spent nearly a year doing that.

Then, in March 2015, two days before I was supposed to take my new samples to a big international coffee conference, the Saudi Arabian-led military coalition began to bomb military targets in Yemen, to deter a Houthi rebel takeover. There was a no-fly zone declared. I had worked the whole year to produce these coffees to bring them to this conference, and I was stuck, along with thousands of other Americans. The State Department wasn't helping us.

I decided to take matters into my own hands. I went to the port city of Mokha, a very old, very historic port. I hired a boat to take me and my samples across the Red Sea to Djibouti. I remember being in the middle of the ocean on this little piece of wood, the waves tossing us up and down, thinking, "Why did I do this?" But I made it to the airport in Kenya.

When I landed in San Francisco, there was a media frenzy. A legal aid organization I had previously worked for had put out the word about my journey, and I was interviewed by NPR and the BBC. I made it to the conference—and our coffee scored among the highest of all the coffees around the world. Blue Bottle bought our coffee and eventually sold it for \$16 a cup.

I'm trying to go back to Yemen in a month, to see the farmers. I spend a lot of time on marketing and sales, but it's important to stay connected to the farmers as much as I can.

I HAD MY FIRST CUP of specialty coffee in San Francisco five years ago and immediately became intrigued. I did a lot of research on the market, and I even bought a popcorn maker so I could roast my own beans at home. When I talked to coffee traders, they all said the best coffee they ever had was from Yemen 15 years ago—but now it was really rare, really expensive, and often full of defects. So I thought, how could I replicate that one perfect cup they had?

I realized I had to go and see these farms in Yemen. But I'll be honest: I did not have a master plan. I knew I wanted somehow to connect my family's country with the U.S., and I thought coffee could be a way to do that. And I knew there was a growing demand in the specialty coffee market. So in the summer of 2013, I dropped out of community college to go. I figured, best-case scenario, I'll find amazing farmers and start a supply chain. Worst case, I would have a break for the summer. I didn't

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**BIG TRIPS
INSPIRE
BIGGER
COMPANIES**



KOEL THOMAE
NOOSA VOGHURT

After tasting a new kind of creamy, full-fat yogurt while visiting her mother in Australia, Thomae decided she had to bring that recipe to the U.S.—and used it to start a company.



PAUL ENGLISH
KAYAK

"You're more alert" when you travel, says this serial entrepreneur. A trip to Haiti inspired him to make enough money so that he could meaningfully help the island's citizens. Online travel search engine Kayak was the result.

LAUNCH