Spilling the Beans

September 30, 2026

David Yancey leads a cupping session with coffee roasters in Johor Bahru, Malaysia.

David Yancey (MBA '16) credits the Peace Corps with launching his coffee career.

As a beekeeper with the Peace Corps in Paraguay, he learned Spanish and worked with farmers, and he wanted to use that experience in his career. When he returned to the U.S. and enrolled in the Freeman School's MBA program, he was exposed to the world of coffee trading, a global and dynamic ecosystem that New Orleans had played an integral role in for more than 200 years.

After earning his MBA in 2016, Yancey landed a job as futures manager at Westfeldt Brothers in New Orleans, the oldest continuously operating green coffee importing company in the U.S. In that role, he executed futures trades to hedge the firm's physical coffee position. After a year on the futures desk, he transitioned into trading, purchasing coffee from cooperatives and exporters around the world to sell

to large coffee roasting companies in the southeastern U.S. After six years at Westfeldt Brothers, he took a break to travel and work for a local specialty roaster, Mojo Coffee Roasters.

In 2023, he returned to coffee trading with U.K.-based Falcon Coffees Ltd., helping the firm to manage its largest accounts and build its business in North America. In 2024, the firm asked Yancey if he would be interested in managing its Asia office. A few weeks later, he was on a plane to Johor Bahru, Malaysia. As managing director of Falcon Coffees Asia, Yancey was responsible for managing a team of Malaysian sales and logistics people, expanding Falcon's footprint and customer base in the region, and liaising between the Asia team and management in the UK.

Workers at a smallholder coffee farm on Flores Island, Indonesia.

Yancey recently returned to New Orleans to be closer to family and joined the Chloe, a 14-room boutique hotel on St. Charles Avenue in New Orleans, as a host, but coffee is still a big part of his life. In recognition of International Coffee Day on Oct. 1, we spoke with David to learn about his most exotic coffee travels, his daily coffee ritual and his advice for students interested in coffee careers.

What's the most unexpected place your coffee career has taken you, and what's the wildest or most memorable experience you've had?

The most unexpected place coffee has ever taken me would be Komodo Island in Indonesia. We were purchasing high quality specialty coffee from smallholder farmers on Flores Island, and I took some of our European roaster customers there to visit. We had an extra day following the farmer visits, I took the opportunity to see Komodo island, snorkel with giant manta rays and see Komodo Dragons.

What's your daily coffee ritual?

I make coffee using the Chemex pour over method every morning. I measure out my coffee beans (my ratio is 1 gram coffee for every 15 grams of water) and grind the beans just before brewing. This is an essential component to good coffee - freshly ground beans and good water.

In five words or less, what's the biggest piece of advice you'd offer to a Freeman student curious about pursuing a career in coffee?

An old school coffee trader told me early in my career to "do what you say you're gonna do." Whether that is send a customer a sample, write up a contract or simply call someone back, just do what you say you're gonna do. So I guess that's seven words, but that's my answer!