



Founder Biographies — Brooke McDonnell

Widely regarded as one of America’s finest coffee roasters, Brooke McDonnell is Co-founder and Master Roaster of Equator Estate Coffees and Teas in San Rafael, California. Brooke prides herself on sourcing carefully crafted coffee beans and teas from growers who practice responsible land stewardship and bio-friendly farming techniques in diverse growing regions around the world.

Brooke was an early champion of fair trade practices that address economic, environmental, and social issues in coffee growing communities. In her dogged pursuit of quality, Brooke supports multiple certification agendas that include shade-grown, Rainforest Alliance, organic and Fair Trade coffees, as well as noncertified growers and cooperatives with good farming practices. Each selection is chosen for ultimate quality in the cup.

In her role as master roaster, Brooke oversees the daily roasting process and works closely with key staff members whom she has personally trained to hand-roast all of the coffee in small batches. Twice-daily cuppings help her ensure that quality standards are consistently met. She also personally cups and “dials in” the coffee for each new account, so that every customer’s brewed coffee and espresso reflect the high quality of Equator’s products.

As the green coffee and tea buyer, Brooke maintains close relationships with growers and importers. She continually monitors product availability and market price fluctuations to guarantee that Equator is sourcing the best coffee and teas, at fair prices. Many of the coffees and teas Brooke has sourced for Equator have become regular offerings, allowing Equator to rely on a consistent supply of high quality coffees and teas year after year.

Brooke was born in New York City , and studied art and art history at Skidmore College. She traveled extensively in her early twenties, supporting her wanderlust habits with a variety of entrepreneurial ventures. These included real estate projects that brought her to Seattle and

Portland at the height of the specialty coffee craze. This experience whetted Brooke's appetite for great coffee, and she was further enchanted by San Francisco's North Beach café culture.

Before she became an importer, wholesaler and roaster, Brooke was an owner-operator of two highly successful espresso bars. This experience gives her an intimate understanding of the perfect cup of coffee, and what her retail and restaurant customers need to be successful.



Founder Biographies — Helen Russell

Helen Russell is Co-founder and CEO of Equator Estate Coffees and Teas in San Rafael, CA. Under her direction, Equator has earned a reputation as a quality-oriented, customer-focused business that takes the lead on issues of social and environmental responsibility.

Helen is responsible for company strategy and growth. She has defined competitive advantage to include social responsibility and sustainable choices. She strives to deliver innovations in procuring, roasting, brewing, and sales and business practices. These initiatives tangibly support the company's commitment to sustainability and social responsibility and they also enhance the bottom line.

Under Helen's strategic guidance, Equator has achieved 10-20% annual growth over the past 12 years. She has done this by remaining focused on developing strong, lasting partnerships with Equator's customers and helping them execute their business plans.

From the moment Helen meets a potential customer, her goal is their success. To that end, she takes great care in selecting a product line-up, brewing equipment, and marketing materials to help them succeed. Helen's natural ability to engage with customers carries on through the initial launch phase into many years of mutually beneficial partnership.

Helen's consistent efforts have attracted and retained a cadre of prominent chefs and bakers, including Thomas Keller of The French Laundry, Traci Des Jardins of Jardinière, Elizabeth Faulkner of Citizen Cake, and Pascal Rigo of La Boulange. Helen has been able to strengthen these and other partnerships by working every day with customers to make sure they have the support they need to execute successfully.

In addition to Helen's focus on sales and customer service, she has volunteered her time and business experience to local and international organizations supporting women and the

environment, including La Cocina Community Kitchen in San Francisco, the International Women in Coffee Alliance, Co-op America and C.E.O. Women. Helen has led efforts to make Equator a socially and environmentally responsible company by investing in an energy efficient roaster, a biodiesel delivery truck, and by purchasing coffees and teas from growers who practice responsible land stewardship and bio-friendly farming techniques.

Helen was raised in Medford, MA, and educated at Northeastern University earning a B.A. in Business.