

CHARLOTTE

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TASTE

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Introducing the Charlotte TasteMakers

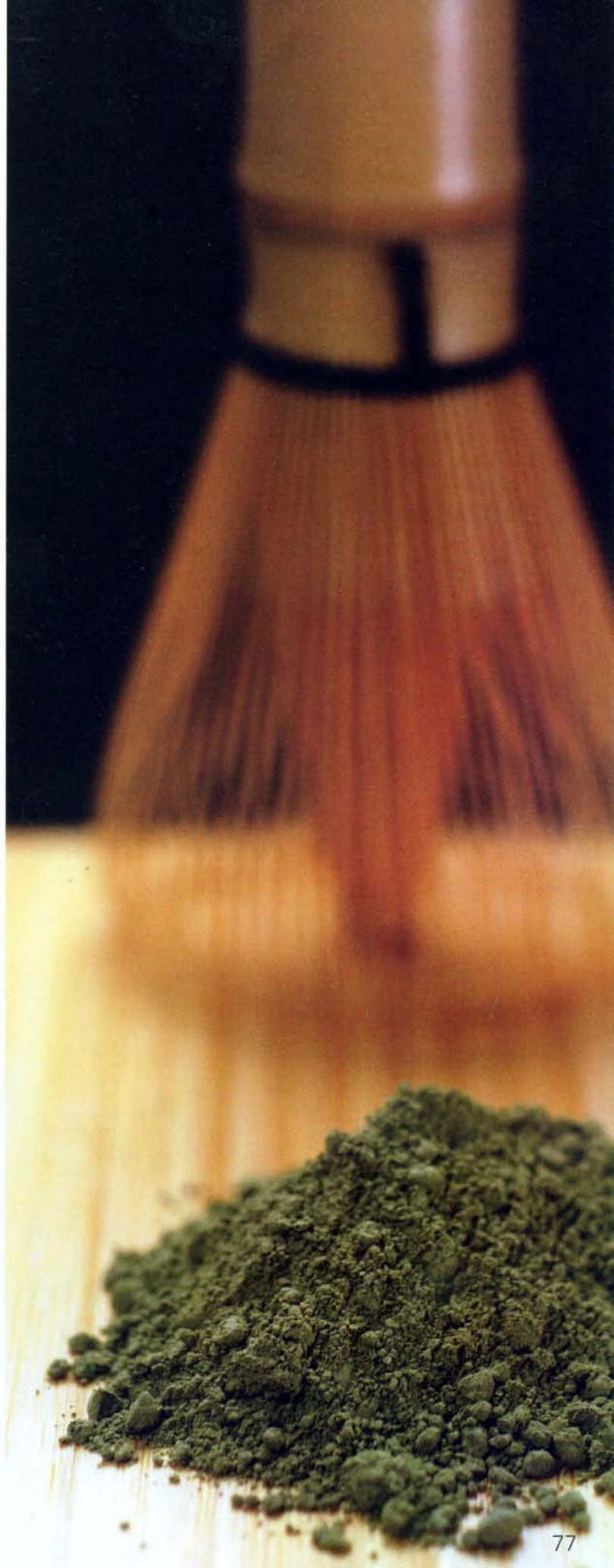
Ann Wolff at Mint Museum of Craft + Design
Best Restaurant Wine Lists
White Christmas

THE CEREMONY OF TEA

Connoisseur alert! Tea is cool and good for you. OK, Charlotte, this Rhode Island transplant may be a 'Damn Yankee' because I came here nine years ago and stayed, but I am not here to talk shop on sweet versus un-sweet tea. I am not even talking about the Salada Tea I grew up watching my parents drink every night, with the little wisdom quotes on every bag. I am talking imports – unique and rare teas – served with the pomp and circumstance of ceremonial tea, whether it is in one of the new uber hip tea bars popping up in chic cities like DC, Chicago and Charlotte, or in the comfort of your own home.

According to *The Wall Street Journal*, tea drinking is on a roll in the U.S. There are some 2,000 tea houses nationwide, up from 200 a decade ago. And tea sales reached \$6.2 billion last year, more than quadruple their level in the early 1990s, according to the U.S. Tea Association. One big reason? Recent research has shown that tea, particularly green tea, is loaded with antioxidants that are purported to aid in warding off ailments such as heart disease and cancer. That is reason enough for this 40-something, yoga-practicing runner and executive road warrior to imbibe the goods. Don't get me wrong, I still stop at the US Airways club for a quick java fix or make my usual daily stop at Starbucks or Summit Coffee in Davidson. But I also enjoy the benefits of this ancient brew, get a caffeine boost if I choose and partake in a ceremony steeped in ancient history by hanging out at Charlotte's cool Urbàna Cityspa and Teabar after a Thai Yoga massage for some culture, good health and an energy rush.

Tea is big business and has been for thousands of years. It is recorded that tea was first enjoyed in 2737 B.C. when the Chinese



Emperor Shen Nung was drinking warm water while resting under a wild tea tree and the wind blew leaves into his water. Before the whistle could blow on his kettle, tea was born. Tea was also consumed in Japan and served to monks who later imported it for their own enjoyment. The Japanese tea ceremony, Chanoyu, is still enjoyed and follows a precise order designed to create quiet and harmony between the host and guest with a goal of spiritual and harmonistic refreshment. Tea later reached Europe through Holland in 1610 and later Britain in 1658. During the 18th century, tea became Britain's most popular drink, replacing ale for breakfast. Tea eventually made its way into North America and its popularity grew. Formal tea ceremonies were a sign of sophistication, social status and wealth, using fine porcelain and silver serving pieces. We all know what happened in Boston in 1773 when the British parliament tried to pass a three pence tax intended to go towards supporting the British military. Boston had its own tea party of sorts, and it wasn't exactly what the Brits had in mind.

That was then and this is now. On a recent visit to the Park Hyatt in Washington DC, I visited the Tea Cellar at the newly renovated hotel designed by world renowned architect Tony Chi. Unique in the United States for its menu and offerings, the Tea Cellar features the deepest inventory of rare and vintage Pu-erh in the country. The Pu-erh teas are stored and aged in a glass tea

humidor at the entrance to the Tea Cellar while the visual focal point of the space is a lit display of tea blossoms that flower when steeped in water. Park Hyatt Washington's Tea Cellar, adjacent to the Lounge and separated from the lobby by revolving wood and glass display cabinets, is an absolute must visit destination for anyone into fine teas. Prices range from \$5 to \$300 per pot.

You don't have to travel far from Charlotte to experience a unique tea and social experience. Locally, Urbana Cityspa and Teabar in Southeast Charlotte is the hot spot (one of our *Charlotte Taste* staffers calls it the hippest place in Charlotte to hang – like something you'd find in the meat packing district in New York). Urbana currently serves 62 loose-leaf teas from around the world and is a great place to experience the ceremony of tea locally.

If you are a fellow connoisseur and seeker of knowledge and wisdom, experience this rite of passage that has been around for nearly 5,000 years. Whether you break out your parents' or grandparents' tea service or serve in your newly appointed tea brewing ensemble, brew some fine teas or visit a tea bar near you. Expand your palate, try some exciting teas and redefine what tea drinking means in the new south. We hope you will join us in sharing this experience with friends and loved ones to preserve the ancient civilized ceremony of tea for generations to come. ■

TYPES OF TEA

Black

Black teas are known as red teas in China and are the most processed of teas. They are strong, have full-bodied flavor, combine well with milk and/or sugar, are energizing, aid digestion, help lower cholesterol and blood pressure, and aid in the prevention of cancer.

Botanical

While black, green, oolong and white teas all come from the same plant, botanical or herbal teas are an herb or a mix of herbs. Chamomile, lemon verbena, peppermint and rosehips are some of the more common infusions or tisanes (French for herbal drink). They are prepared like teas, and can aid in hundreds of ailments, immune system and circulatory functions, and relaxation.

Chai

Chai is the Indian word for tea. In the U.S. it is a spiced brew that is often combined with

milk and sweetener. Cinnamon, cardamom, ginger, anise, peppercorn and fennel are mixed with milk and honey, sugar, fructose or a combination. In India, black teas are used, but Chai is often made with green teas or herbal tisanes. Americans generally have a palate for the sweet spices over savory.

Green

Green teas are the most common teas produced and consumed in China's major tea cultivation zones, and more than 90 percent of green teas are from China. Green teas are less processed than oolong and black teas, but their processing is often time-consuming. Fine grades of green tea may go through multiple drying and rolling processes. Green teas are high in antioxidants and contain caffeine.

Matcha

Matcha tea is a powdered tea that originated in China and was brought to Japan in the 12th century by a Zen Buddhist monk. This style of drinking tea was lost in China during

the Mongolian invasions, but it became a popular style in Japan and is an important element of Japanese tea ceremonies. Over the years, very little has changed in the centuries-old tradition, and it is currently gaining a following in North America. Athletes love it for its immediate energy boost and enhancing concentration.

Oolong

Partial fermentation gives oolong teas, also known as blue-green teas, the freshness of green tea and the body of black tea. They are delicate and tend to be distinctively fragrant and fruity. Good oolongs have a floral aroma and a peachy taste. The finest have complex tastes and fragrances. Others may be more like green tea in flavor and aroma. Authentic oolong teas are produced only in a few regions of Taiwan and China where climate is optimal.

Pu-erh

Pu-erh is a fully fermented tea produced only in one small area of southwestern China,



URBANA CITYSPA & TEABAR
Editorial information on tea
types graciously supplied by
Urbana Cityspa & Teabar

Charlotte's hippest hangout for teas is in South Charlotte at Carmel Village. The Urbana Teabar features over 70 loose teas imported from Japan, China, India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Africa and other tea-producing countries. Owners Nancy and Jim Goodwin buy directly from tea importers who work directly with top tea gardens to purchase the best in-season fresh teas.

By Brian Fatté, Large Photo Courtesy of Urbana Cityspa & Teabar

and one of the most popular teas in China. According to traditional Chinese medicine, Pu-erh has numerous health benefits, is known for body slimming and many swear it is the best cure for a hangover. In a French study, results showed that drinking three to four cups of Pu-erh daily for just 30 days was more effective than taking the most advanced cholesterol-lowering medications.

Rooibos

Rooibos is African slang for red bush. Not a true tea, this herb is cultivated in the Southwestern Cape region of South Africa. The rooibos plant is green but the fermentation process turns the leaves from a green to a deep red color. Rooibos teas are full-bodied with slightly sweet notes and are popular either hot or iced. They have 30 times the antioxidants of green tea and are anti-mutagenic, anti-carcinogenic, anti-inflammatory and anti-viral.

White

White teas are the least processed of teas,

generally with only air drying and slight oxidation. High quality white teas are harvested for only a brief period each spring before the leaf buds have opened. The resulting taste is subtle and complex, with a delicate, naturally sweet flavor. White teas are grown in China, India and Sri Lanka, but true white teas are only produced in the northernmost part of the Fujian district of China. Because of their delicate nature and flavor, white teas should be steeped well below boiling for at least four or five minutes.

Yerba Maté

Yerba maté is often referred to as the tea of South America, although it is actually not a tea and comes from a member of the holly family. Cultivated in Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay, Yerba maté has more caffeine than coffee, offers energy plus vitamins, minerals and antioxidants, and has a long list of health benefits recognized centuries ago by South American native Indians. This tea does not have the same

side effect of nervousness associated with caffeine consumption except in very strong varieties.

Our Favorite Recommended Teas

Avongrove Single Estate: Urbana Teabar

Royal Genmaicha Green Tea: Mitea.com

Euphoria Single Estate: Urbana Teabar

Tropical Blend Black Tea: Urbana Teabar

Secret Orchid Oolong: Mitea.com

Yellow Peach Botanical Blend: Urbana Teabar

Treasures of Inca Botanical Blend: Urbana Teabar

Ineeka Himalayan Green: Mitea.com

Geish Green Tea: Urbana Teabar

Jasmine Pearls Green Tea: Urbana Teabar

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