



TEEA

trends

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From its roots as a tonic in ancient China



to its emergence as a social stimulant in European society to its expression in modern trends like bubble tea, the leaves of *Camellia sinensis* have traveled the globe for millennia by camel, donkey, schooner and jet. Hearty and robust or ethereal and fragrant, tea now flavors chocolate, cocktails, spa scrubs and more. Tea is ever unfolding, like the beautiful hand-tied clusters of tea leaves that blossom into delicate flowers when submerged. The world's oldest beverage, second only to water in popularity, is both ancient and modern, steeped in tradition yet constantly reinvented for a global audience thirsty for its virtues.

To learn more about the latest news in tea, we talked to Robert Rex-Waller, certified tea specialist at Park Hyatt Washington, D.C., where he presides over the inviting Tea Cellar. The menu tempts with a range of tea, from mild white tea like White Dragon to earthy fermented pu-erh, identified by year and costing as much as \$300 for a pot of 1985 Emperor's Masterpiece. Guests linger in the sleek, Zen-inspired Tea Cellar over pots of brew with evocative names like Underwater Garden and Moonlight Jasmine Blossom.

While majoring in Chinese language and literature, Rex-Waller realized "you can't really study Chinese language without learning about tea in general." His passion

for tea ignited, he journeyed to tea plantations in China and Japan. Pouring tea in the nation's capital, Rex-Waller sees tea-driven tastes brewing. "There's an interesting trend in spa products at the moment: integrating teas into lotions, scrubs or massage oil." Spas around the world incorporate tea into treatments, treasuring the pure, natural product potent with antioxidants. White and green teas are lending their anti-aging properties to cosmetics as well, such as Clarins Double Serum, which is rich with 20 plant extracts, including *Camellia sinensis*.

Tea adds a complex dimension to food as well. Tea-smoked duck, the quintessential Szechuan dish, forged the path for Tea-Smoked Oysters at Desnuda in New York, and Tea-Smoked Pork Spare Ribs at Myers + Chang in Boston. Rex-Waller advises the home cook, "any recipe that calls for water or milk or butter, you can infuse the tea into that liquid. For example, I've seen green tea noodles." For an easy whisper of smoked tea flavor, try Smoked Tea Sea Salt from Vanns Spices — coarse Pacific grains smoked with black tea, spices and maple and cherry woods.

Envelope-pushers are blending main-dish flavors directly into black and green teas. Numi Organic Tea's new line of savory teas includes six flavors such as Broccoli Cilantro and Tomato Mint. "They're pushing the boundaries of tea, which is what I like to see," says Rex-Waller. In a similar vein, Millies Savory Teas offers "comfort food in a broth" with flavors like Spicy Tortilla and Thai Lemongrass.

Green tea and matcha, the finely ground Japanese green tea venerated in traditional tea ceremonies, have a natural affinity with dairy and desserts. Old-news green tea ice cream inspired the ubiquitous green tea latte, and creative chefs introduce the flavor into cakes, crème brûlée and more. There is even a hard-to-find green tea Kit Kat candy bar, subject of cult-like Internet devotion. Imaginative chefs appreciate how





the aromatic, complex flavor of tea perfectly complements a bounty of confections. Baked into shortbread or infused into jam or chocolate, a whisper of tea brings a refined, sophisticated essence to all it permeates.

Mixologists around the world are bringing the subtle essence of tea behind the bar. The roots of this vital trend stretch to the punchbowls of bygone centuries. Traditional punches rely on blending five ingredients: tea, sugar, lemon, alcohol and spices. Tea Forté markets a line of teabags specially concocted to infuse into alcohol and craft into cocktails such as a Lavender Pear Martini. Absolut makes it even easier with their Absolut Wild Tea vodka, which balances robust black tea with delicate Scandinavian white elderflower. Green tea enlivens Zen, a Japanese liqueur by the makers of Midori. Qi White and Qi Black, from white tea and cedar-smoked black tea enhanced with fruit and spices, are evocative liqueurs made in San Francisco. And Vintage Teaworks handcrafts wine-inspired teas: Pu-erh Cabernet and Oolong Chardonnay are two of the blends of loose tea they've introduced.

The ancient commodity — once the cargo of camel caravans — now journeys in the realm of the digital age. Websites such as teadiscussion.com, teachat.com and steepster.com bring tea enthusiasts together to share tasting notes and more. "Adagio Teas has a really wonderful online community," says Rex-Waller. "It gives everyone a chance to talk about tea and learn about teas from one another, so there's an online conversation about tea, which is fascinating." Adagio Teas takes the virtual aspect one step further, offering perhaps the first crowd-sourced selection of tea blends. Any customer may develop and order a custom tea blend, give it a name and some graphics and make it available for the public to purchase. Over 33,000 customer-conceived blends honor everything from "Game of Thrones" to Jane Austen.

The cherished tea leaf has never been more popular, thanks to the health

benefits it conveys, the inventive new ways it's being incorporated into drink, food and products, and its devoted fans. Tea authority Jennifer Sauer — author of *The Way to Tea: Your Adventure Guide to San Francisco Tea Culture* and the blog Bon Teavant — speculates "a Native American healer with whom I once studied taught me that plants needed for our own healing will often show up in our gardens. Perhaps, in the same way, tea has reemerged in a significant way in our country when we most need the benefits for which it is heralded: slowing down, contemplation, serenity, illumination, intimacy and community. It is the antidote to the alienation and rush brought on by technology and our national addiction to productivity."

For all the innovations tea has inspired, its essential appeal is eternal: to bring people together around a steaming pot, brewing shared contentment and quiet delight.

FOOD. THOUGHTFULLY SOURCED. CAREFULLY SERVED.

As a global leader in hospitality, Hyatt proudly embraces a conscientious initiative to promote sustainability in its restaurants. Launched in 2012, "Food. Thoughtfully Sourced. Carefully Served." is a food and beverage philosophy that ensures guests enjoy the finest culinary options, while promoting a sustainable future.

Recipes, menus, food sources and waste are all strategically evaluated with regard to their impact on guests, local communities and our planet. Recipes are created with close attention to portion control, calorie counts, fat and sodium. Menus offer a range of healthy options, including gluten-free and vegan alternatives. Cage-free eggs and naturally raised meats are increasingly used, and chefs are encouraged to source ingredients locally and organically. Some hotels support local agriculture by sponsoring, hosting and participating in farmers markets.

An industry-leading commitment "to support the health of our guests, planet and the local community is at the core of every food and beverage decision that is made at our properties," says Susan Santiago, Vice President of Food and Beverage, Americas Operations.

Hyatt is also committed to offering healthy meals to its youngest guests — over three million children are served annually at hotels and resorts throughout the U.S., Canada and the Caribbean. The For Kids By Kids menu features fresh, nutritious offerings, which were tasted, tested and approved by kids.