

Steep Drinks

The Tea Craze Boils Over

Tea. The word brings to mind a state of comfort, coziness and warmth. Tea seems to have lost its following in recent years, now that its wildly popular, dark rival—coffee—has hit every street corner in big name chains like Starbucks. But tea is making a comeback in a huge way, with quaint tea houses, tasting rooms, merchants, and aficionados popping up all over. A few well-known houses are in Manhattan, such as Moby's contemporary vegan tea house, Teany (www.teany.com); the sublimely romantic Victorian style Lady Mendl's Tea Salon (www.LadyMendls.com), with its five-course high tea; and Chelsea's serene, multi-level Wild Lily Tea Room (www.wildlilytearoom.com) with its Asian flair and fishpond to help recalibrate the yin and yang.



Pouring a cup of organic earl grey tea at the Village Tea Room.

But why is tea suddenly so enticing? This could be due, in part, to its health benefits. Black tea promotes healthy arteries and increased blood flow due to antioxidants called flavonoids, which give tea its flavor. Cholesterol levels drop as tea consumption increases. Tea is reported to reduce the risk of cancer, yield fresher breath and fewer cavities, and help build bones. It also contains approximately half the caffeine of coffee, and is a rich source of vitamins and minerals. The plant from which green and black tea emerges, *Camellia sinensis*, yields many varieties of tea due to differences in growing regions, soil types and preparation methods. Tea is generally thought to be a British tradition, but it was born in China over 5,000 years ago, when, according to legend, several leaves chanced to fall into Emperor Shen Nung's pot of boiling water.



Martha Szigethy of the Cup & Saucer Tea Room enjoys a spot of tea with Joan Fraioli, Jeannine Secor, and Shirley Hot

The secret to brewing great tasting tea is the loose leaf, as tea bags contain dust and ruin the quality. Other critical elements to great taste are fresh, cold, oxygenated water which is not over-boiled, and attention to brewing time (three to five minutes).

I visited the newest tea house in the area, **The Village Tea Room** in New Paltz. This old-fashioned establishment, owned by Agnes Devereux and Dan Sheehy, is a delectable, bohemian, two-story paradise with three indoor seating nooks (one is family oriented) and a front and rear patio. Behind a baked goods counter, Devereux is ready to greet with a warm smile. She and Sheehy offer more than 20 imported teas, sophisticated, seasonal foods, and creatively scrumptious daily specials. I chose Egyptian

Chamomile to accompany white bean and winter greens soup, acorn squash packed with wild rice stuffing, and pumpkin cheesecake. The meal, the vibe, and the entire experience was unique and exquisite.

Born into the Irish hospitality business, Devereux became more acquainted with food while living in Paris, and learned an abundance working at Manhattan's Union Square Cafe.

"I love tea," says Devereux. "People don't get tea made correctly, so it's misunderstood and they don't like it very much. I wanted to have a place where tea is done very well. When we make black tea, we use a special machine that heats water to 220 degrees. People normally use the hot water spigot on their coffee machine, which is 190 degrees and not hot enough to extract the flavor, so it becomes insipid. And they leave the bag in the cup, so by the time they have their tea, it's become tannic and bitter. We provide three minute sand timers, so you know when to take the bag out. We scald the porcelain pots so they stay nice and warm. We have a receptacle for the bag, because if you put it on the saucer, it drips all over the place. I want this to be a lovely experience, with fine quality, estate teas."



The dining room at the Cup & Saucer

Located at 10 Plattekill Avenue, The Village Tea Room is open Tuesday through Sunday, 8am to 9pm (closing at 8 on Sundays). Afternoon tea is Tuesday and Wednesday from 2 to 4pm, with tiered stands of sandwiches, scones, cookies, and pots of tea.

(www.thevillagetearoom.com, 845-255-3434.)

"In the UK, anytime there's a problem or a crisis, the first thing that's asked is, 'Shall I put the kettle on?'" says a **Spot Of Tea's** Angela Jones. "It's the answer to everything. A cup of tea always makes things better!" British-born Jones and her co-owner and husband Lou have the know-how to serve authentic English fare in a cottage setting. Offering Harney and Sons tea, they serve an extensive

menu of traditional British cuisine and even have a "chippy" (a takeout fish 'n' chip window open Thursday through Saturday evenings). Their "Royal Tea" consists of finger sandwiches, homemade pastries, clotted cream, and hot tea served on Royal Doulton porcelain. Located at 55 East Market Street, Rhinebeck, they're open Monday, Thursday and Friday from 11am to 7pm, and Saturday and Sunday from 10am to 6 pm.

(www.aspotoftea.biz, 845-876-1842.)

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—Agnes Devereux of the Village Tea
Room

"Tea is making a big comeback lately," says Irish proprietor Martha Szigethy of her **Cup And Saucer Tea Room**. "Having a tea room stirs up a lot of interest. It's nice to see people's surprised faces when they open the door. They don't expect this in Beacon." The three-year-old Victorian/British tea house hosts a "tea party for one"—a pot of tea, scones, assorted sandwiches, and dessert. Cup and Saucer serves (and sells) G.H. Ford tea and offers a lunch menu of grilled sandwiches, salads, soups, crepes, and quiche by a British cook. Located at 165 Main Street, Beacon, Cup and Saucer is open 11am to 5pm every day; closed Tuesdays. (www.cupandsaucertearoom.com, 845-831-6287.)