

Tea and tell

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At Yixing Xuan Teahouse in Singapore's Tanjong Pagar precinct, I am seated opposite tea master Vincent Low, who's telling me about the mysteries and benefits of oolong, green and white varieties.

The calm and learned Low asks me which I think is healthiest. "Green," I reply, with full belief that the multiple cups of matcha I drink daily are doing me a world of good.

Wrong. It is white, the least processed of

teas and with the most polyphenols. It's just withered and dried after picking and he invites me to feel the stalky texture.

White tea is grown mostly in China and Sri Lanka and its curled buds and tips are silvery. You can expect to pay a lot for silver needle varieties from Fujian province, with a short annual harvest.

Yinzhen Baihao white variety, says Vincent, is "best for glowing skin" and has a fresh, woody nose that has attracted perfume companies, including Bulgari and Demeter.

White, green and black oolong all come from *Camellia sinensis* bushes but are processed differently.

Oolong, says Vincent, is partly oxidised. Herbal teas such as rooibos, camomile and



peppermint are a separate category, along with florals. For an hour we swirl and sip as Vincent tops up little cups from a kettle kept freshly boiled.

He delights in showing me a cutting from a British newspaper decrying the addition of milk and sugar to brews of any kind. I do not broach the topic of coffee nor reveal I had an espresso a little earlier from Five Oars, a hipster hangout across the road.

A tasting experience at Yixing Xuan Teahouse is available for guests of Six Senses Duxton, a short stroll away, or book direct online.

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