

White Tea, The Dancing Lady

Move aside, green tea and black tea. Dancing into health-conscious drinkers' heart is the white tea. Our tea connoisseur, VINCENT LOW, explains why white tea is also known as the Dancing Lady, and its intriguing health properties.



Health-conscious tea drinkers are turning their attention to white tea. Of all tea types, white tea is known to have the strongest potential in fighting cancer. The reason is simple. It is the least processed of teas. White tea retains a greater concentration of polyphenols, and hence the highest anti-oxidant potency.

Some teas are processed more than others. White tea comprising of single shoots is steamed and dried, leaving the leaves "fresh". Green tea, comprising of one bud and two side leaves is steamed, slightly fired before being rolled. Oolong tea comprising essentially of matured leaves is partially fired and black tea is fully fired.

Why is white tea so powerful? White tea comes from a young bud of the tea plant whose energy is at its highest potential. Once harvested, white tea is not rolled or oxidised. It is simply withered and dried in natural sunlight. The other types of tea, including the green tea, are dried and pan-fried. Therefore, they are oxidised and have lost some of their potency.

Clinical tests conducted by Oregon State University, comparing white tea to other teas and anti-oxidants, showed astounding findings. White tea is one hundred percent more effective than green tea as well as Vitamin E because it has more than three times the amount of polyphenols, which is a potent anti-oxidant found in tea that is widely acclaimed to help improve the body's defenses and suppress free radical activity. Polyphenols are extremely beneficial for one's overall health.

White tea represents the rarest of teas. It is processed in China, the homeland of tea, and remains a carefully guarded proc-

ess. This unique tea is picked during a few short days each spring when tea trees are re-emerging from winter dormancy, making its anti-oxidant extremely potent. Only the youngest leaves, still covered with short white hair are selected. At this time, these buds are literally bursting with new life and energy, and this is captured in white tea. Up to 10,000 handpicked shoots are needed to produce one hundred grams of this aromatic tea.

WHITE TEA - THE "DANCING LADY"

It has a beautiful and unique pale amber colour when hot water is added. It bobs up and down in a glass of water slowly, unwinds and performs an aesthetic dance. In their original form, white tea leaves, when picked, are tightly wound buds. They slowly unfurl and dance as they release their character and flavour for our enjoyment. Their behaviour is certainly different from the more stagnant, broken bits of tea leaves found in a pot of loose tea or tea bag.

White tea has a very subtle flavour, slightly sweet and contains hints of honey. It has a very mild milky taste. Most teas taste best when served at very hot or ice cold temperatures. White tea is a delicious beverage at any temperature and for any occasion.

THE ART OF TEA BREWING

Most people assume the miniature teapots and tiny cups noticed in shops were made for display, not actual use. They are wrong. Fine utensils which are handmade and used are prerequisites for making and drinking a perfect cup of tea.

The manner of pouring tea is like a dragonfly because one 'hops' from cup to cup pouring a little tea into each until all are full. This method ensures each person enjoys the same 'strength' of tea flavour. The predominant poetic image for making tea is a ship at sea. The sea is a large flattish bowl. The tiny teapot that 'sits' on it is made of zisha - special high fired purple sand that is porous enough to trap and retain the essential oils of the tea. Overtime, teapots are properly seasoned and become highly priced.



In serving tea to a person, two cups are required; a 'fragrance' and a 'drinking' cup, both placed on a small plate. The fragrance cup is taller and narrower than the drinking cup, which comes with a slightly wider flared lip. Tea is first poured into a fragrance cup; its fragrance and colour can then be appreciated. The tea is then transferred from the fragrance cup into the flared cup for drinking. Other utensils include a tea leaves dispenser, a tea scoop, tweezers, a 'justice' cup and a pot for discarding leaves, and a glass kettle and stove.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vincent Low is the owner of Yixing Xuan Teahouse. A former banker, he obtained his MBA from Brunel University in West London. He was an avid coffee drinker until he realised he needed a life change. He then headed off to study tea in China and Taiwan and since then, he has not looked back! He has given tea lectures over the past 23 years. He has appeared on the BBC, Belgian Com, ChannelNewsAsia and in radio talk shows, 938 Life and Australian radio, and has also been featured in many magazines. IGP



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PASSION FOR CHINA AND TEA LED TO YIXING XUAN



There is more to making tea than meets the eye as you can discover at Yixing Xuan Teahouse.

Like most people, you will be routinely overwhelmed by the volume of Chinese history and culture. The inability to read or speak Mandarin contributes greatly to the mystery. You will be delighted that English is spoken at Yixing Xuan. Yixing means a happy relaxing place; xuan means a small house. It remains the venue of choice for visitors keen to learn more about what exactly they are drinking, thanks to its excellent tea application courses.

You will be welcomed by its owner, clad in a navy Mandarin-style jacket, and with a business card in hand. Low, a former banker, may have completed his MBA with Brunel University in West London, but his heart has always been set on China; he went on to study tea there. Upon his return 23 years ago, steeped in the finer points of Chinese tea, he set up his own teahouse in Chinatown.

CHINESE TEA APPRECIATION

Frankly when you enter a Chinese teahouse for the first time, you will be very skeptical. How exciting can a teahouse be? But you will be intrigued by the variety of tea, the true story from plant to palate, not to mention the history and current 'insider' tips and techniques - all these topics contribute to a very interesting and relaxing atmosphere.

TYPICAL HIGHLIGHTS

You will see the correct way to make tea - it is surprisingly different to traditional Western methods

and so is the taste - delicious. For instance, the Japanese tea ceremony follows rigid rules which do not apply to Chinese tea drinking. For the Chinese, the ingredients for tea drinking include good tea leaves, music, incense and camaraderie. The pace is spontaneous and leisurely.

Also, when one translates into English the names of the tea utensils or the description of tea preparation, the poetic finesse of the Chinese is lost. You will see a huge range of authentic tea and tea-making equipment like the traditional red clay 'sea pot' (you have to see the sea to understand it).

You will get to brew tea and be treated to dian xin (hot Cantonese delicacies or yum-cha and other favourites prepared by a 5-star Hong Kong dian xin chef).

PARTICIPANTS

This is a great experience, highly recommended as something very different and it truly exceeds expectations. Great for expatriates and visitors! Visitors include Queen Elizabeth II and Prince Philip in 1991. The teahouse is also a local favourite for corporations, schools, and clubs.

DURATION

Booking in advance is normally required but you can try your luck if you have cravings for tea! The whole experience takes about 45 minutes. Dian xin can be over in as little as 20 minutes or you can take your time and enjoy a leisurely meal.