

# Global Tea Hunt

TEA & TAO MAGAZINE

April 2014



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**I**n April, the warm weather returns to Taiwan. With the sun, guests start arriving from around the world—their smiles reminding us why we work so hard. Our vision is crystalizing in every way, towards a bigger, more-permanent center we all look towards with a sense of home. This magazine is a further extension of that spirit. We hope that our smiles show up in these envelopes, so that you open them as you would open your door to find us on your stoop. Do you see all the love printed on these pages? And in the tea you'll drink before/after reading the articles? And we hope that you also see each other's influence in Global Tea Hut. Our mutual love for tea brought us together to learn and share, grow and expand. But a college isn't just a place where you study with people who share your interests; it's also where you meet some of your lifelong friends, maybe even your wife or husband. Similarly, may this be so much more than a magazine to you. May it also be a meeting place for friends, brothers and sisters (and maybe even a tea party or two!).

Global Tea Hut is starting to look a lot more like the final form we have always envisioned, at least in terms of outer appearance. We hope to continue improving, traveling more to seek out new and interesting tea stories, journalism as well as exciting teas we've all never tasted. We also hope to start connecting organic farmers with a love of Nature, promoting and expanding the market for more sustainable tea production. Most of these betterments are content-based, though. We have achieved our goals of printing in full color, having better packaging that protects the tea while maintaining a cost that allows us to utilize the majority of your contributions towards maintaining our free tea center in Taiwan.

This brings us to an important point in our discussion: How do you feel about the more "finished" product? Is it great enough to share with your friends? Do you already tell everyone who loves tea about Global Tea Hut? What aspects of the experience do you think could be further improved? Are there any glaring defects? At this stage, we are still growing our community, so it's important that we get your feedback. In fact, your comments are as valuable to us now as your help promoting this experience. We earnestly want to make this the best tea magazine in the world, and therefore thirst for any criticism that can help us improve. We want tea lovers throughout the West to pick up a copy of this magazine on your coffee table and immediately start asking about it. And we believe

these goals are attainable. What's more, our movement is driven by the selfless work of volunteers who recognize that the true spirit of tea is one of sharing!

We have also realized another important way we can begin to connect you to each other, and see each other reflected in your individual journeys. Many people in this hut are creative, working in so many different media. If any of you are involved in a project or create small artworks that you would like to share as the GTH gift one month, we think that everyone here would love to receive that—just like we all prefer handmade gifts, made with love, to store-bought ones. In that way, we also see the tea spirit in each other's creative works! Any artists, musicians, poets or photographers who would like to share their craft with this community, feel free to contact us!

Speaking of artisanal crafts, in the tea world, harvests are starting all over Asia. Farmers and pickers are working very hard, plucking leaves by hand in the morning sun. They won't sleep much once the harvest begins, as their livelihood will to a great degree depend on their spring harvest. Remember that every tea is someone's sweaty bandana, scuffed knees, blood and sweat, heart and soul. You respect that by devoting yourself to the brewing and drinking with gratitude for their work and Great Nature, and by extending your heart to the last part of the process, as you share their tea with the people you care about. We are doing just that. You are the people we care about!

It always feels as if the activity of the harvests and production, the attention and devotion paid to Tea at this time of year lends our tea sessions a sense of gravity. And why wouldn't it? The fact that so many people around the world are out at this very moment in honor of Tea brings Her joy, and She smiles at us through our bowls—straight into our hearts. Besides looking around the Hut with a smile to your brothers and sisters assembled here, let us also raise a bowl of this month's tea to all the farmers and pickers out there working so hard today. In honoring our tea, we honor them as well.

***For questions, more information, or to submit an article of your own, contact us at:***

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## 2014 WILD TEA BUDS, SHENG PUERH DEHONG, YUNNAN, CHINA

The cracked, old gourd rises up out of the steamy water like a dragon mounting skyward from a foggy lake. With the mastery of one who has poured the ten thousand bowls, the master deftly swings the steaming gourd by its bamboo handle to your bowl. In the same motion, his other hand appears with some strange leaves in, as if summoned from some magic space beneath his robe. He scatters the small handful of buds into the bowl and the water swirls out of the gourd in cloudy rivulets, twirling the leaves round in dervish prayers. He rests the old ladle on a special branch he's found for that purpose—perfectly-shaped, with a crevice that has received the handle after many thousands of pours. Smiling, he gestures to your bowl, also picking up his. You nod and raise the old, worn bowl to your lips. The liquor is as clear as the water that still boils in the old urn on the fire, but its bright fragrance betrays a hidden depth. The tea is magnificently limpid. It rushes up your sides and purges your mind and body. With each sip, you feel refined. And you can see the same mirrored in the old master's eyes—now glimmering with an inner light...

Such magical bowls echo through all the tea we share, in every bowl or cup. The last few months, we've explored some teas that were interesting not just in the experience of drinking, but also because they allowed us to explore some of the history of tea, the different kinds of processing and to understand more about the genres and varieties of teas. However, we don't want to get off balance, turning our tea practice into an intellectual pursuit. We don't want to get lost in the intellect, despite the fact that the tea world is intriguing. If we did focus only on an approach of tea as hobby, we'd miss out on the bowl the old master is offering. Hanging around tea shops in the market, we'd walk right by the trail that leads to his hut.

The heritage of tea is much older than any modern processing methodology, dating back to tribal times. In those days, the processing and preparation of tea were very simple. Tea was thought to be "immovable", un-transplantable in other words, so there was no such thing as domesticated tea trees—all tea was discovered. Certain old trees were famous, and some even had names. After finding a tree, the drying of the leaf was also done very simply. The tea was picked and sun dried. The brewing then consisted of tossing a few leaves in a bowl and adding water, or perhaps boiling the leaves themselves. This

process was shared between shamans and handed down to their apprentices over generations.

These ancient shamans used tea to commune with Nature. They were the priests and sacred teachers of their people. But their role didn't end there. They were also advisors to the councils that decided the tribe's fate, as well as the doctors and healers in charge of the physical and spiritual well being of their people. They carried tea in their medicine pouches and brewed it, amongst other herbs, to heal their patients. It was said that a single bowl of the right tea could heal anything. What do you think?

We humans often have a very myopic view of life, regarding the current milieu as the end-all of human experience. Sometimes it's difficult for some people to see out of the modern perspectives on tea, as an agro-industry for example. Nevertheless, why should tea be defined by the ways it's grown, processed or brewed nowadays? Such limitations will only hold us back in many areas of our tea journey.

It is interesting to learn about the history of tea, the processing and types, etc., but such intellectual knowledge can also get in the way of a great tea experience. Some of the best tea sessions we've ever had were with people who knew very little about tea, its history or lore, or even how their tea was made. It's not necessary to understand all that goes into making a song and building all the instruments in order to enjoy some music. And many musicians will tell you that sometimes it's better you don't read musical notation or understand the inner workings of a piano; it can get in the way.

One of our teachers had a humorous, Zen-like way of dismissing linear questions about a tea. When someone would ask how the tea was grown, he would reply, "Why, you want to start a tea farm?" And when someone would ask how a tea was processed, he would similarly smile and ask, "Why, you want to open a tea factory? I thought we were here to *drink* tea!" He wasn't being rude or arguing against their question, but pointing out that the mind that produced such a question wasn't the mind most conducive for a tea ceremony, or even necessarily for enjoying tea. You can't thoroughly enjoy a cup of tea and discuss tea processing at the same time. You can't be fully present onto a tea's aroma while discussing tea history. There is no amount of information that will make you better at tea brewing, serving or drinking. These are experiential skills.

Despite the fact that our practice is in the heart, it is nice to understand a bit about the kinds of tea, how



*Notice how different these are from normal tea buds*

they are made, their history, etc. Such information is especially useful when evaluating and/or purchasing tea, as there are a lot of gimmicks in the tea market (or in any industry). It can also be fun to drink an aged Liu Bao whilst simultaneously exploring the rich heritage, history, processing and appreciation of that tea. At the same time, it is nice to be able to have an off switch to the mind—to approach tea the way the ancients did, as leaves and water. In doing so, our bowl is but an extension of the old master’s...

A balanced tea journey is so much more rewarding, one that involves an intellectual understanding of tea as well as the ability to rest in the heart and approach tea as sacred space.

Our tea of the month is the perfect chance to connect with the older, deeper and non-linear aspects of tea. In this day and age, many of us have lost our connections to the sacred—in ourselves, our friends and even Nature. We no longer connect very deeply, not even with our own families. Tea like this month’s is good medicine for that.

There is not much by way of the intellect to understand about this tea. It is unprocessed. It doesn’t fit neatly into any genre of tea, and all you need to know about it is found in the bowl. Still, we’ll tell you some details about where it comes from, too.

As we have so often discussed in these magazines, Yunnan is the source of all tea on earth, and home to a tremendous amount of tea varietals, mutations and natural distinctions. The wild tea trees that grow in the different mountains often have their own distinct characteristics. Seed-propagated tea, grown in biodiverse forests with room to grow, is what we call “Living Tea”. And every tea seed is unique, resulting in a great variety of trees even on a single mountain. Over these last years of Global Tea Hut, we’ve explored several mutations from Yunnan, including the famed purple-red tea we all love. This month’s tea is a similar mutation.

One of the varietals of ancient trees common in certain areas of Yunnan produces a very unique bud every year, one that has a thick skin around it. Such trees can be found in Lincang, Dehong and a few other regions as well. Our tea of the month comes from Dehong. The trees are ancient, several centuries old. This tea comes from nearby to the trees that produced the Sheng brick tea that we sent out in October of 2013. They are, of course, very different, as the buds on these mutated, wild trees are unlike any other kind of tea. This tea isn’t quite a white tea, nor is it Puerh. It escapes our conceptual categories.

The buds on these trees often arrive earlier than other tea trees. Our tea is extremely fresh, having just been plucked in February of this year! It has arrived at

## Tea of the Month

your door directly after drying—super-fresh! The buds are sun dried. That's it for processing. *Like the ancient shamans, the tea was found, plucked and dried.* Now it's up to you to add the heat and water. What else is tea but leaves, water and heat?

The liquor is bright and clear, with hints of citrus and pine. It whispers of hikes up through the forests where it was born. In drinking it, you might imagine a time when all tea was so simple—sun dried leaves from old, wild trees that were untended by Man. It cleans the blood and digestive system, as well as the mind and spirit.

You feel refreshed and open, as if your pores were just scrubbed, when drinking this tea. It also suits the spring, having such amazingly fresh vibrancy in it. We hope that you enjoy this amazing chance to return. Lao Tze said the Tao is a returning... to what, we wonder...



### Brewing This Month's Tea

Over the last few months, several of you have asked us to include some brewing advice each month. And we've known that a lot of the members of Global Tea Hut are new to tea and would benefit from such advice. At the same time, we have some reservations. Whenever anyone asks Wu De what his favorite tea is, which is often at lectures, seminars, etc., he always answers, "tea made with love." Each of us has to find the way that connects tea to our hearts, our lives and our understanding of the Sacred. Each of us must find our own insights and truths. You can't be afraid to make mistakes and learn, as you get better at brewing tea. While we can offer you some suggestions based on the five brewing methods of our tradition, we don't want you to be limited by our advice—neither in the sense that you think you must prepare the tea this way, nor that if you do you should follow a formula to the letter without learning to use your own palate and heart.

This month's tea is for us very much a bowl tea. Bowl tea is the oldest method of tea brewing on earth, dating back before the pyramids. We brew bowl tea for meditative stillness, simplicity and sharing space with people we care about. Bowl tea is also the simplest brewing method. Any small bowl will do, like a rice bowl for example, if you haven't got a tea bowl. Start by rinsing off your bowl with hot water. Then gently scatter a few of this month's buds into the bottom of the bowl (five to seven—or more if you like your tea stronger). Add some boiling water to the side of the bowl, dancing the buds in a circle and carrying them under the water so they open up uniformly. Use water with small to medium-sized bubbles, rather than a full rolling boil. As you sip, try holding the bowl with two hands, centering yourself over it.

It is a good practice to not multitask when drinking tea. In fact, try not setting the bowl down until it is empty. This doesn't mean you have to drink it faster; go as slow as you like. But even as you sit holding it, Tea is still communicating to you. Watch these glorious buds open up; feel the warmth in your hands and smell the aromas wafting up into your face. See what happens when you drink just three bowls in this way, alone or with friends. It may just change your life!

(There is a video up on our YouTube channel demonstrating bowl tea. You can watch it at: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sajLoRe9P4&feature=c4-overview&list=UUUVI\\_Qhcg-GSkf57HmcAp\\_YA](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sajLoRe9P4&feature=c4-overview&list=UUUVI_Qhcg-GSkf57HmcAp_YA))







## LEARNING FROM TEA

BY SHANE MARRS

Connection through tea is so accessible. There is this magic that happens during a tea session where superficial engagement with one another tends to fade away. Those interactions where the weather, what's for dinner and how things went at work no longer become the focus of a conversation. Gone is that old argument where we generally try to convince the other of our point of view, so that the receiving party finally defers and says, "Okay, you're right, I agree," which upon reflection, wasn't nearly as fulfilling as our ego had us believe it would be. All of those concerns can certainly wash away like dust from a cleansed tea bowl. When a bowl of warm tea sits between guest and host, parent and son, teacher and student—whomever it may be—a more uniting, relaxing, and genuine connection often arises. Tea has the ability to connect us in a *Namaste*-space (where, when I am resting in mine, and you are resting in yours, we are one). Whether that connection be with ourselves, with others or with Nature, it brings harmony, reverence, purity, and at the best of times, stillness into our shared lives. Why that is, I'm still not quite sure, and yet it most certainly is!

On a recent trip home to British Columbia, Canada, I didn't just want to catch up with friends and family, I wanted to connect with them. I wanted to address important matters and appreciate each moment with a playful awareness. I wanted to see the same old people for the very first time. I wanted, at the end of a social gathering, to reflect and feel a stronger relationship to the people who shared that space. Not at the expense of outlandish laughter or goofiness, mind you, but with such a short visit home, an enduring connection that would last until my next visit, or at least span the Pacific Ocean, was most important to establish. Of course, for me, that meant connecting through tea.

After living in Taiwan for over a year, and embracing a daily Life of Tea, I also had the opportunity to represent my tradition of Cha Dao by serving tea in ceremony. Unknown to me at the time, there were lessons to be learnt as a result of being outside of my everyday serving environment. There was something profoundly different about serving tea on my own in my home country, something that deepened my commitment to this tradition and the people I love and care about so much. I found myself back home, drinking tea daily, and casually scheduled to host a handful of tea ceremonies during my stay. Each gathering confirmed some important messages:

### *Each gathering is the first and last.*

Though I found myself serving tea to a group of old high school friends, the tea ceremony provided us the chance to see each other for the first time, or at least in a new light. Like the cleansing of the bowls, left empty, warm and without impurities, so too we give ourselves, as human beings, the chance to be embraced anew. High school never left a good impression on anyone anyway... Gathered in a kitchen, spring *chaxi* assembled, everyone sat in silence, save some tea music, and how impressively they gave themselves to the moment, treating each bowl as the first and last.

Silence. Prolonged silence. Surely a foreign experience to this particular group of friends, though audibly without they remained, for at least five or six bowls until the first of my friends felt it appropriate to simply say, "Thank you." Raising my bowl, I agreed. Here was a group of people, with countless moments and memories shared together in the past, sharing one more in a completely different way over a bowl of tea. Everyone could feel the difference; and yet, who's really to say exactly what it was? Whatever it was, it allowed space for a new way of engaging one another—a space where I saw old friends anew, and that made us all smile.

The tea, music, *chaxi* and the gathering itself naturally ended. Without a trace of itself, that was the last time we'd ever have tea together again. Not because we'll never see each other again, and not because it's too far fetched that each of us should gather at the same time and same place in the future, but because we were all unique in that moment, as were the dishes in the sink, the blossoming city trees, and the alignment of the planets and stars. To hold on to any particular aspect of that moment together would be a disservice to the ceremony itself. Like a properly cleaned and respected tea bowl, it leaves no trace of the previous tea session and only holds space for the infinite possibilities of a new one, in a new moment.

### *Each gathering is a meditation.*

At the Tea Sage Hut, we adopt a life based around Tea. We adapt our diet to tea, we study about tea, we drink and serve tea daily, experiment with tea, and we meditate to make better tea. What better mind is there to brew tea than a clutter-free mind? We need only look





*The author serving tea for a meditation group*

to our bowls, kettles and teapots to observe how a space free of impurities brews. A calm heart and still mind are necessary to brew tea, lest our tea taste of emotion and ego. How bitter!

When given the chance to serve tea to a small meditation group, I felt most at home. The meditation “preceding” the tea ceremony was actually the start of the tea ceremony. Where meditation ended and the tea ceremony began, only the discriminating mind would know. There was much less need to “manage” the silence or anchor the tea session at this ceremony. Though everyone was unfamiliar with this outer approach to tea, they all understood the inner approach. It wasn’t so much about the tea as it was where the tea drew our attention, and all leaves seemed to draw us inward.

Most of them just seemed to get it. There wasn’t much need to ask questions or elaborate on the experience. Alert and tranquil was the theme of this tea gathering. Breathing in, we could feel our bodies united with the Leaf. Breathing out, we smiled at our bodies. Breathing in, we could feel the Qi of our hearts. Breathing out, we smiled at our hearts. Breathing in, the tea was fully drunk. Breathing out, bows of gratitude were deep.

### *Each gathering is a letting go.*

Often times, words can get in the way, leading us astray. We forget that words act as signposts, pointing beyond themselves. Through words, we can at the best of times successfully achieve communication. Through silence, however, we can court communion. There is great truth that actions or non-actions speak louder than words alone.

I found myself in such a predicament, where words (or my lack of linguistic substance) failed me in attempting to discuss with a friend the importance of water for brewing tea. There are almost too many obvious points to address because water is a seemingly simple component of the tea brewing process, and yet it is so crucial. Where it’s sourced, how it’s stored, treated, improved, heated and even how it’s poured all make significant differences to the final cup. Really good water has all the features of a fine tea: It should be smooth and silky, slightly viscous and coating; it should splash up to the upper palate, promote salivation, swallow smoothly and quench one’s thirst; it should also have a neutral Ph, an appropriate mineral content and absolutely no flavor or aroma. In our tradition we often say, “teaware before tea”, and we might also say, “tea water before tea.” The former means quality teaware should be considered before quality tea. This is because high quality teaware

can bring out the best of even a lower grade tea, whereas low quality teaware will actually undermine the quality of a fine tea. Ideally, we would have high quality teaware and tea. In the same sense, fine water will bring out the finest in tea. There's really no point in assessing or enjoying the quality of a fine tea if we don't start with quality water.

At this particular tea ceremony, at my friend's teashop, the water spoke for itself. There was no need for my water pitch, and no need for my friend to resist it. It became obvious to us both that water matters. I let go of trying to (poorly) explain the matter, and he let go of the idea that heated water is all the same. Everyone else just enjoyed the tea. What through words may have divided us, through water and leaves united us.

### *Each gathering is a mystery.*

Simple, that a bowl of tea should sit between us; profound, that it should shift our entire awareness. That a group of eclectic strangers, misfits if you will, can sit around a table over leaves and hot water in complete silence is beyond me. What is it that draws people the world over to unite over this enigmatic liquor? Part of that mystery is something I hope never to grasp and instead always to marvel at. That all the energies of the universe from the very beginning should unfold in such a way as to bring us together over tea is nothing short of miraculous!

The Mystery arises not so much from the unanswerable questions about any given tea session, but from that space where all the questions disappear. Where do they go, and why does that happen? I remember my first tea ceremony at the center in Miaoli after becoming a student. I could have asked ten thousand questions about the tea, the water, the brewing pot, the *chaxi*, the tea jars and on and on—the questions became the pillars of my mind. After countless bowls and endless steepings, those pillars crumbled and gently gave way. What was funny wasn't that I couldn't think of a question when finally prompted, but that I couldn't think of a question that even mattered, as if nothing really mattered at all. Far from nihilism, I stood by the fact that I had no meaningful questions and just wanted to drink some more tea.

At one point in my final tea gathering, well into the ceremony, I asked if anyone had any questions. The group was speechless, they didn't even say no. Which was great, because that meant it was time to drink more tea and carry on in silent connection. Seated in yet another teashop, drinking warm shou puerh on a cold Canadian eve, everyone lapsed into the Mystery that drew them to this gathering in the first place. Where everyone was from and what they did wasn't of any concern. Nor where they were going after or what their favorite tea was. None of it had to be addressed, and yet everything seemed strangely complete.

### *Each gathering is perfect.*

Returning to Taiwan and reflecting on all of these ceremonies and servings, I also realized that each gathering over tea is perfect. Once you sit down at the tea table, all is as it should be. Sit down and practice surrender. Nothing needs to be changed and no fuel given to the idea that it can be better than it is. It is just as it has to be. It won't be like the last, nor should it be. The perfect tea ceremony is relative. In fact, it is the imperfective tea ceremony that lends itself to mastery, still leaving room for improvement and growth, and thus being alive. It is human to never reach perfection, and yet always strive for it. As long as connection is achieved and each sip embraced, one can't ask for anything more. The perfect tea ceremony isn't without imperfections, but being poised towards them, and moreover, being fully present onto what's at hand: a bowl of tea.



*“It is called a tea ceremony, not tea drinking. It is not a tea shop or a tea stall, it is a temple: here, ceremonies happen. This is only symbolic. In the whole of life, around the clock, you have to remember that wherever you are it is a holy land and whatever you are doing it is divine.”*

**—Osho**







## Gongfu Tea Tips

## GAIWANS & GONGFU MODERNITY IN TEA

In pursuit of mastery, which is the essence of gongfu tea, it is important to understand all aspects of your brewing experientially, testing and retesting what works for you. In doing so, you improve your relationship to your brewing methods, as well as your tea and teaware. Many tea lovers inhibit their progress by not testing their own assumptions. Not understanding where a particular kind of teaware comes from, the purpose for using it or whether or not it actually enhances tea limits you to copying others. True mastery is skill we become; it's a part of us. We can articulate it, sure, but more importantly demonstrate it. *The proof is in the cup.*

In the last few decades, so many new brewing methods and kinds of teaware have been invented. Some of these innovations are genuine improvements; others are attempts to be unique stylistically or to fill an economic niche. Other new brewing methods are just a relaxation into lesser quality tea in exchange for something quicker and more convenient. That may be an acceptable compromise for some of us to make.

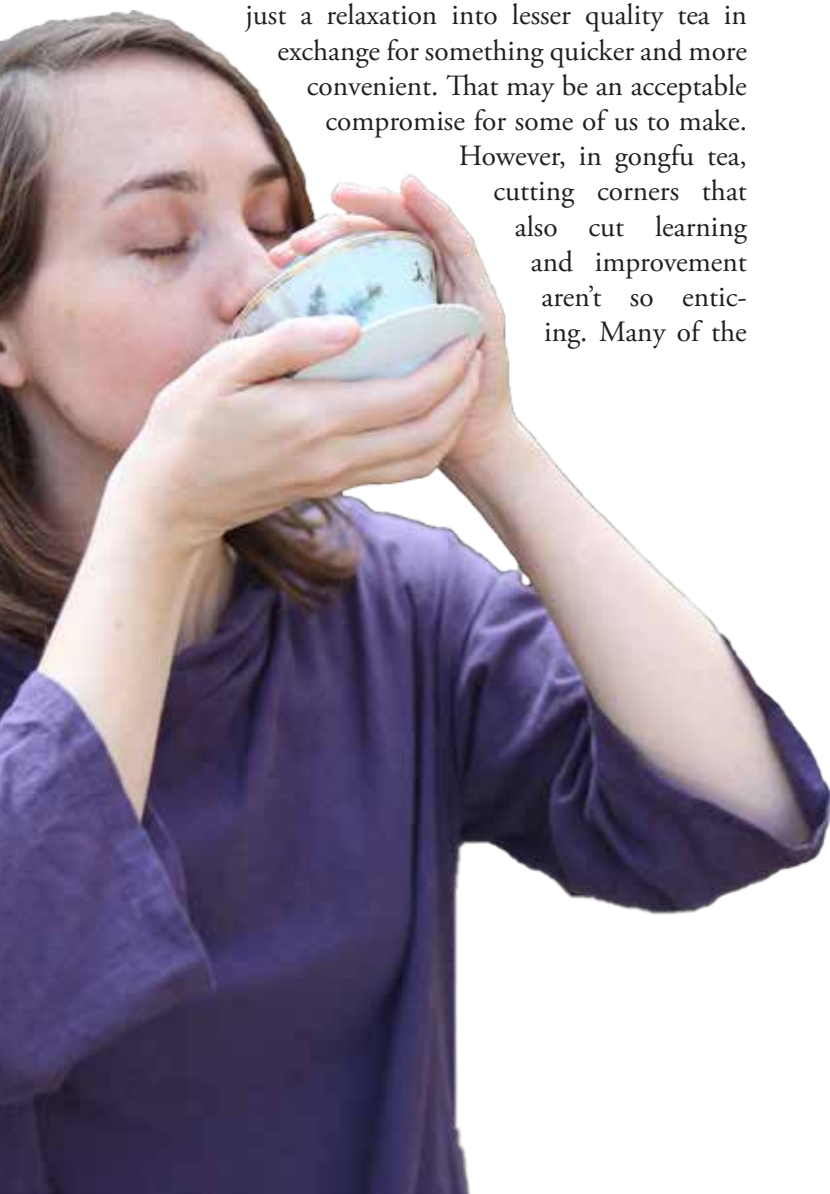
However, in gongfu tea, cutting corners that also cut learning and improvement aren't so enticing. Many of the

inventions and adaptations in brewing and inventing new kinds of teaware were made by people who don't approach tea the way one who is practicing a life of tea would; and some of them aren't even tea people at all—attracted to teaware by the popularity, they shift from other forms of pottery because teaware is more lucrative. For all of these reasons, even seemingly established or popular kinds of teaware should be evaluated, understood—both practically and historically—then tested personally to see if they actually suit our brewing style, rather than just using them because many others do. Isn't it that way with all things?

This month, we thought we'd discuss one such kind of teaware, and offer an experiment towards understanding it: the gaiwan. “Gaiwan (蓋碗)” literally means, “lidded bowl (cup)”. Actually, gaiwans aren't new at all; they have been around since the Qing Dynasty (hundreds of years). What's new is the way they are used nowadays: as brewing vessels. The gaiwan was originally just as its name implies, a “lidded cup” for drinking out of, much like we make bowl tea in our tradition. Leaves are added and then hot water. The saucer, which was probably influenced by the West, was used because the body of the cup was hot. The drinker therefore held the cup by the saucer. The lid served to both keep the liquor warm, as well as to stir the leaves away from the mouth when drinking.

In Chinese, people who drink tea very casually are sometimes called “kitchen drinkers”. There is nothing wrong with that at all, and it shouldn't be thought of as a condescending term. It just means their approach to tea isn't as serious as a tea practitioner (*Chajin*) or even a connoisseur. To the latter, mastery and quality matter. Gaiwans were mostly used by the former, to casually offer tea to guests while chatting or at tea houses or theatres to sip on while watching some entertainment or at a social event. The leaves were added and the cup was conveniently refilled by waiters/servants/the host, often carrying kettles of water around. This wasn't really a brewing “method” per se.

In the 1980's, some tea lovers in Taiwan began using gaiwans as brewing vessels and the trend caught on. Nowadays, almost every shop in China and Taiwan uses gaiwans as brewing vessels. Rather than drinking out of them as a cup, which they were intended for, they hold the lid with one finger, the rim with the others and pour the steeped liquor out into a pitcher. It is usually suggested that because the gaiwan is porcelain you only need one for all tea, rather than a porous Yixing pot which is





usually assigned to a particular tea. Other people report that they use gaiwans because they are “neutral” and you can better evaluate the tea that way.

We are often left wondering two things: First, if they know the history of gaiwans; and, second, if they have ever experimented with them/their reasons for using them or if that is just what they have seen and heard and then copied. What would your experience have to say if you actually put a gaiwan to the test? Are they really good as brewing vessels? Are they truly neutral?

To start out with, there are two ways you can experiment with a gaiwan: material and shape. As far as the material goes, you could compare the gaiwan (porcelain) to any number of other kinds of clay. We would suggest starting with the traditional gongfu teapot, made of Yixing purple-sand clay. The experiment is easy: put three grams of tea in each, steep the tea for an equal amount of time and then decant into two identical cups. It helps to

use a tea you are very familiar with, like all gongfu experiments, and brew it lighter than usual (less leaves). Sometimes, it’s also beneficial to hold one cup in each hand and sip back and forth to compare the liquors more quickly and directly. Which is smoother? More fragrant? What of flavor? Mouthfeel?

To test the shape of the gaiwan you’ll need a porcelain teapot, preferably made by the same company that made your gaiwan so that the clay is identical. Once again you can put three grams in each, steep for the same amount of time and then decant into two identical cups. Try answering the same questions above, this time with regards to the different shapes—a pot and a gaiwan.

Maybe next month we can once again dive into the notebook of a gongfu student to see what their conclusions were. Then, you can compare their notes to your own...



## INCLUSION IS THE WAY FORWARD

BY WU DE

In an awakened heart, the consequences of one's choices are never ignored. Some of our actions have apparent effects, while others create invisible results—too distant or subtle to be obvious. Though much of what we do is bound up in the apparent consequences of our choices—the day to day challenges in our immediate environment—the compassionate and awakened heart also takes responsibility for the influence she has on distant situations, being conscious of how her choices effect tea growers on the other side of the world, for example. It is our responsibility to rest in the truth that our choices impact the world, encouraging others to see their connection by consciously acting on ours. If you love tea, and we know you do, you *want* to recognize the impact your tea drinking has on the world, big and small, positive and negative. When you live in California and are enjoying some tea grown in a small village in China it is no longer possible for you to deny the global connectivity that humanity has achieved. And if you really love that tea, you also cannot ignore the simple fact that *you care*, you really do!

The compassionate heart doesn't seek to fight or exclude people. Recognizing our connection to Nature and each other, we also realize the fundamental truth that we are all in this together. Every being on this planet has an equal stake in its fate. At the same time, that doesn't mean we can or should not stand up against behavior that so obviously leads to the success of some few individuals at the expense of whole species, or even our own future generations. Sometimes you have to make a choice, and that doesn't mean you are unforgiving of the ones participating in that activity. As I used to tell the kindergarten students I taught, "It isn't you who are naughty. You are good. It is *what you are doing* that is naughty!" And we have to wake people up to that—to their connection to others and to the world—while at the same time standing up for what is right. William Faulkner said it quite poignantly:

*Some things you must always be unable to bear. Some things you must never stop refusing to bear. Injustice and outrage and dishonor and shame. No matter how young you are or how old you have got. Not for kudos and not for cash. Your picture in the paper nor money in the bank, neither. Just refuse to bear them.*

Still, the "refusal" Faulkner mentions need not be charged with negativity. Too much resistance only causes people to dig in their heels. It disconnects us and moves us further apart. I'm sure you have had the experience of

arguing with someone when you absolutely know you are correct. The harder you push, the more it seems they retreat into their unreasonableness, and though you may "win" the argument, you feel worse than when you started, and more disconnected. That you had logic on your side is little consolation. It is only with compassionate understanding as well as mutual goals that we can effect real and lasting changes in the world.

I would like to illuminate some of the challenges I see amongst tea vendors with regards to a global movement towards organic and sustainable tea production. Of course, there are the big companies, primarily producing tea bags, whose problems are more obvious to the tea lover. They are also more challenging to address. Few of us around here are purchasing much of that tea, anyway. But I want to address the merchants who honestly do love tea and care about the loose-leaf teas they sell. If they don't recognize or care about the environmental impact their company has on Nature and the tea industry, we can only do our best to help them feel the truth in such connections. Meanwhile, we can also express our dissatisfaction kindly and use our buying power to make wiser choices that support those who are awakened to the importance of sustainable agricultural practices.

If you search around the Internet you will find more than a few tea vendors who have addressed the issue of organics overtly. Others will if you ask them. The arguments that they give for why their teas *aren't* organic are usually one of these three (or some combination of them): 1) Organic teas aren't good enough quality; 2) Many small farmers are organic, but cannot afford certification; or 3) The certification process itself has issues, including but not limited to corruption. I think it is important to address these ideas, and understand why we as tea lovers must refuse to stand for them.

### ***Organic teas aren't good enough quality.***

Though this seems to me the most foolish of the three arguments, it is the one you hear most often. The first problem with this idea is that all teas produced for thousands and thousands of years were organic, and if you have ever tried some of the old, vintage tea that is still around (like a very old Puerh) you know that those teas are amazing. In fact, a part of why aged teas are so desirable is that they come from a world before agro-pollution of any kind. High quality teas were sent as tribute to the emperors for centuries, and the poetry that eulogizes such





### *Organic leaves nibbled by bugs*

amazing brews is not suggestive of low-quality tea. Therefore, it is important to recognize that we do have the capability to grow better, more delicious crops organically; and that amazing teas were produced that way for centuries.

Still, even if the organic teas produced nowadays aren't as good as their counterparts, this argument creates an inescapable catch: if no one supports organic farmers, and organic processes do not succeed in the market, how will the quality ever improve? In order for the production skills, effort and care of organic tea to improve, more people will have to start supporting organic endeavors. As demand increases, farmers and tea producers will invest more in creating higher quality organic teas.

Also, this argument really only applies to teas that are available in mainstream tea markets. If you know where to look, you can find amazingly delicious organic teas like the ones we find for you every month. Nevertheless, recognizing that quality is determined by flavor brings us to the final issue we have with the argument that organic teas aren't as good.

As I discussed in March's issue (which you can see for free on our site if you weren't subscribed at the time), we must rethink what we want. Our value systems need to start including provenance. In other words, how a tea is produced should be as relevant to its quality as how it tastes. We no longer have the luxury of enjoying personal satisfaction at the expense of environmental destruc-

tion. Better to have a tea that tastes worse than one that destroys Nature, just like it's better to eat a blander dinner that's good for us than to eat unhealthy junk food that tastes "better". Some of the so-called "good" flavors in junk food don't even taste very nice once you realize where they come from. Looking at fresh, green rows of chemical-laden tea is akin to looking at a really buff guy on the cover of a magazine who only looks that way because he took lots of steroids that are bad for him—doing irreparable internal damage. Is the surface really the end of our value system? Is a good taste all we want from tea?

### *Many small farmers are organic, but cannot afford certification*

There is truth in this actually. Not only is certification relatively expensive, but there is no global certification process, making it impossible for a local farmer to get certified in all the countries his tea may wind up in. Also, the standards aren't universal amongst the different tests, so while he may be certified MOA in Taiwan (see previous issues to learn about MOA), he won't necessarily meet the more rigorous tests of the European Union, especially if some of his neighbors aren't growing organic tea. Some small farmers in Taiwan, for example, are only interested in the local market. They don't grow enough for international business, and don't speak English any-

way. It would consequently be a waste for such a farmer to apply for USDA organic certification, even if he was interested in certification.

Recently, some groups have begun helping the farmers that cannot afford certification to achieve their goals. Most often, these groups were formed by conscious tea merchants who care about the environment. They recognize that if the farms whose teas they sell have certification it also benefits their business and therefore raise money to help the farmers achieve that. Master Tsai, who has shared teas with Global Tea Hut several times, is a shining example of that. He has raised money by doing events, drives and from customers to help certain farmers make certification more affordable. This is an excellent way for a merchant who cares about the environment to get involved.

Rather than complaining that many farmers don't have certification, a conscious vendor of their teas should work towards helping them achieve that—to the mutual benefit of the farmer and vendor alike. Furthermore, we find that most all the vendors who use this argument do not, anywhere on their websites, provide examples of farms which produce tea organically but are not certified. In other words, they say they don't sell organic tea because small farmers cannot afford certification, or the process is complicated internationally, and then don't offer a link or an explanation as to which of the teas they stock fall into this category. Does lack of certification make a tea inorganic? If you have teas that are clean, though the small farmer cannot afford certification, why not tell me so? I recognize that claiming a tea is “organic” is illegal without certification, but they could show pictures of the farm and farmer and discuss the fact that his farm is small, and that he adds no agro-chemicals, concluding with full disclosure that the tea is not certified organic. Several of our Tea of the Month teas fall into this category. What we find, on the other hand, is more of an attitude of “small farmers cannot afford organic certification, therefore we don't carry organic teas.”

### ***The certification process itself has issues, including but not limited to corruption.***

This argument also has merits. There is a lot of corruption in the world, but that is no reason to give up! Some certification processes, like MOA, are more reliable, and others less so. This is why it is important to choose vendors that you trust. A vendor who encounters this problem may want to join one or many of the movements towards more rigorous certification standards, recognizing that there will always be corruption in such processes as long as humans are willing to sell their connection to Nature, not realizing that the loss “over there” which resulted in their personal profit “over here” still effects them, their world and future generations of their family.

Ultimately, it doesn't matter that there is corruption, as intention is what marks the merits of our actions.

If you donate 500 dollars to an orphanage and the manager steals 200 of those dollars, that isn't your problem. You freely and open-heartedly gave to charity. That charity has a problem. The manager has a problem. The mistake is his, not yours. If you find out, you may not want to support that charity in the future, or make your experience public so as to influence a change in the management of that orphanage. Either way, this is no argument to stop giving to orphanages altogether. Similarly, it isn't an argument to give up trying to support sustainable tea production.

The whole concept of “organic” and the certification process that surrounds it has some flaws. At the same time, it's the best we have at the moment. We should support it, help it iron out its problems and use it to educate people towards better quality, environmentally friendly agro-products, including tea. It would be great, though, to transcend the need for “organic” or “certified”, in any way—to reach a time when all agro-products are produced without genetic modification or chemicals which harm humans or Nature!

Here at the Hut, we try to remain optimistic and promote positive change in the world. It doesn't really matter why a vendor says they don't carry organic teas, or don't do so exclusively, because if you are actively looking for a reason to give up hope, you'll find one (or many). Furthermore, the honest truth, which they think would lose our respect, is that they don't carry organic teas for financial reasons—either they don't sell as well, aren't as available or don't offer the same profit margins. I, personally, would respect a vendor more if they were open and forthright about the financial motivation behind their unsustainable teas, rather than sugar-coating the issue with pseudo-arguments.

Anyway, it isn't the vendors' responsibility. It's ours. We are the ones who can make a change in global tea production by taking a stand for organic tea. If the tea isn't certified, fine, but is it clean? Clean and lacking any agro-chemicals isn't something that requires a piece of paper to prove. The tea is or isn't produced in a way that is harmful to people and/or Nature. And as you drink more and more teas, you can begin to notice the effects such chemicals have on the tea, especially when they are used heavily.

If all of us start demanding this, the merchants will have to follow the demand, and you will see a rise in organic teas across the board, as well as more informative descriptions that describe the tea's origin, farmer and philosophy. We believe that this is what the intelligent consumer wants. And it leads to a more awakened, connected and compassionate world—one in which tea consumption in California has a positive effect upon a farmer's life in China.











## DA QIAN SIDE-HANDLE POTS

BY LINDSEY GOODWIN

In Taiwan, many cities and towns are known for their specialties, both quotidian and sublime. One town is known for roasted sweet potatoes, while another is known for its handcrafted woodcarvings, and a third is famed for its roasted oolongs. As *Chajin*, one of our favorite towns to visit is the pottery town, Yingge. And in Yingge, our favorite potter is Peter (Kuo Shih Qian) at Da Qian.

Peter's side-handle pots are sculptural forms with wooden handles and ash glazes. Their speckled surfaces are comprised of a muted color palate—white, powder blue, moss green, French grey, hematite, ochre—yet their subtle color and texture variations dazzle the eyes. Some portions are matte; others crystalline, iridescent, glimmering. Some are smooth; others scratchy and nubby. But beyond their appealing surfaces, they are consistently brewer-friendly and tea-centric, which says more about their function and feel than their form. You might guess that their maker spent decades perfecting his craft. And you'd be wrong.

### *Local Boy Makes Good*

Peter is only 30 years old, which makes him about 20 years younger than your typical shop-owning artisan in Taiwan. But his success at such a young age makes sense in the context of such a pottery-centric life. Peter was born and raised in Yingge, and spent many hours of his childhood playing in his uncle's ceramics factory. But it wasn't until he was 18 years old, rapidly approaching graduation from Taiwan's most prestigious arts high school with a major in sculpture, that he first began to work in clay.

A chance meeting with a local pottery teacher got him hooked on the medium, and he spent the next few years earning money to pay for ceramics classes and further his studies. By age 23, he was working with ceramics full time. He taught ceramics classes to tourists in Yingge as his main source of income, but continued to actively experiment with forms and techniques all along.

Over the years, his experience, resources and skills grew. In 2006, he rented an old teaware factory, renovating it extensively to make it into a ceramics classroom and studio, where his own work only occupied a small shelf. And in 2008, a major shift occurred—he started drinking tea with a local *Chajin* and began to produce teaware borne out of the practice of drinking and “feeling” tea. That same year, he began to study under a famous wood-fired ceramics teacher, and learned to use this firing method

to produce ash-speckled wares akin to those discussed in the January issue of *Global Tea Hut*. He fell in love with the technique, and by 2011 he had built his own wood-firing kiln, where he continues to fire ceramics every two months. Then, in 2013, he turned his classroom into a showroom, shifting his focus from teaching ceramics to producing and selling teaware.

### *Expressing Peace*

In the short time since Peter opened his gallery, he has produced several collections of teaware. Each collection is marked with its own small, stamp-like “button”. Though each has its own distinctive look, there is a continuity of some essential quality behind the pots, so that each group fits cohesively into Peter's larger body of work. He said the differences in each collection are there because he prefers not to produce large quantities of a particular style for money. Rather, he prefers to make things slowly, creating each piece as a unique expression of the feeling he wants to share. And perhaps this is where the continuity within his body of works arises. Peter said this has to do with the work being genuine: “The feeling cannot be fake. The art cannot be fake. You can feel the connection with the pot every day when you use it.”

Indeed, just as with serving tea, creating pots which truly express something meaningful cannot be faked. And the meaningful expression behind Peter's pots is one of peace—the peace that he finds in drinking tea. He said the main reason he started to craft teapots was because he started to really drink tea, and to feel calm and peaceful while drinking tea.

Furthermore, Peter said that when he does not have peace in his heart, he cannot perform his craft. Without peace, his pots get skewed on the wheel. With peace, even when he is firing teapots for four days straight without any sleep, he can do well.

Over cups of Taiwanese oolong tea, Peter said his ideal teapots communicate the peace of tea and work harmoniously with the overall *chaxi* to create tea sessions that are smooth throughout the entire process of serving tea. He said there is no one perfect pot, because there is no one perfect way to have a tea session. He added, “Each is a unique expression, and a single teapot cannot express all of a person's spirit.”





*Peter working late at night, setting up the kiln*

## *From Clay to Tea Table*

Peter spends his days (and many of his nights) mixing clay, building pots by hand, drying wood for the kiln, firing his wares, adding final touches, and selling his pieces. When I asked about his favorite part of the process, he closed his eyes for a few moments, swaying his body back and forth a bit as he considered each step. Then, his eyelids flew open and a wide smile spread across his face. Animated, he answered, “Each part is different, and each part is good. But there are two moments when I am especially happy. When I am driving to the kiln to fire and when I open the kiln and see my artwork, I feel very excited.”

These two moments seem to capture much of what Peter’s life work is about: a strong drive to create and a relishing of the results, always with an eye on what can be done differently next time. There’s a sense of play behind it all, a sense that Peter is creating these pots for the joy of creating them, and making them better each time around because that’s simply what makes him tick. And that same sense is threaded through each step of his work, from clay to the tea table.

Each collection of pots starts with Peter geeking out about clay, and delighting in doing so. Studying under a wood-firing master, Peter learned how to mix his own clay for wood-firing. He didn’t know how to mix clay for teaware, but he did know how to enjoy tea, so he set about learning to evaluate clay mixes for teaware. Now, he has a process for doing so: First, he mixes a batch of clay using

raw materials from all over Taiwan and sometimes also from America. Then, he tests the mix out with a firing. He sees what a pot made of the clay does to water and, if the result is positive, he tries it out for tea. Finally, he hones in on the mixture he wants before he begins making and firing pots.

After the clay body is ready, Peter begins to build teapots. His education in sculpture helps him create innovative three-dimensional forms, but he doesn’t favor the usual “art pots” you’d expect from a former sculpture major. Instead, Peter prefers to fashion relatively simple side-handle pots instead of more unconventional forms. He said this is because side-handle pots allow him to experiment more, and because they enable tea brewers to do the same. He said he loves to play with form and that he continually experiments to improve function, and it would seem that he wants to allow those using his pots to do the same in their tea serving.

After Peter has constructed his teapots, he turns to the local lumber factory for scraps. Then, he dries these odds and ends thoroughly in preparation for the firing. (He was, in fact, doing just this until 6 AM on the day of our interview.) Next, he stacks his works in a three-square-meter kiln. The kiln can hold as many as 20 large pieces (such as tea jars) along with many more small pieces. And once the kiln is loaded, Peter is ready to start firing.

The active portion of wood-firing takes four days, and aside from the occasional nap, Peter doesn’t stop to sleep during the process. Fueling the fire with the wood

## *Da Qian Side-handle Pots*

he has dried, he works the kiln up to a heat of around 1400 degrees Celsius (a blazing 2250 Fahrenheit). As the kiln gets hotter and hotter, he watches for visual signs of its progress, relying on these indicators rather than a thermometer to see when it's time to coat the ceramics with ash. He said the ash starts melting at around 1200 degrees, but he waits for the reflective, blue-green glow of the pottery that appears around 1400 degrees. It is then, on the fourth day, that he adds a batch of firewood through a special side-door in the kiln, directly into the pottery chamber of the kiln. Under the extreme heat, the firewood is instantly transformed into ash. The ash scatters down over the ceramics below. As it touches down on their blue-hot surfaces, it melts, spreading outward over horizontal surfaces and downward over vertical ones to form fantastically organic and un-plan-able colors and shapes as it expands. But Peter won't see the results of the ash's dispersal until a week later, when the kiln has cooled to a manageable temperature and he can open it safely.

After Peter has removed the works from the kiln and inspected them to see what makes each one special, he works on some final touches. These include cleaning and smoothing their surfaces and adding wooden handles to pots. Peter said he usually uses charred bamboo roots

for handles. This is in part because of bamboo's poetic associations in Chinese culture. (Virtuous people are called "bamboo" in some old Chinese stories.) But more importantly, it's because the nodes in the bamboo root make the handle easy to hold, and because the oils in your hands will change the color of the handle with use over the years, so the pot evolves with you and your brewing.

When his works are complete, he is ready to sell them at his shop, Da Qian. He runs Da Qian with his partner of five years, CiCi. The couple greets guests as most pottery shops in Yingge do—with tea. Next time you make the trip to share tea with us here in Taiwan, set aside a day to take a jaunt in Yingge and to pay a visit to this talented local teaware artisan. Like many visiting *Chajin* before you, you may just find your new favorite teapot in his shop!



*Peter adds firewood to create the ash that will decorate the pots' surfaces* ▲





*Gorgeous pot shaped like a jar, and with a canon spout ▲*



*The ash speckles Peter's pots in a wonderful way ▲*





*Peter's artwork on display in his shop, Da Qian* ▲





*Peter makes amazing kamados that have valves for steam ▲*



*A geometric pot with old wood as a handle ▲*



## OVERCOMING THE FEAR OF SERVICE

BY STEVE KOKKER

I could likely count on one hand the times I raised my hands to speak in class throughout the entire eleven years of my elementary and high school education, and on two the times I volunteered an answer to a question. In elementary school, when the teacher would go through a list of questions to be answered by each student in turn, I'd frantically count the kids ahead of me, and try to establish the answer to my question before the heavy focus fell onto me. I was a very shy kid and had a major dread of having to speak spontaneously in front of others—what if I got the answer wrong, what if I sounded stupid? My stomach would turn instantly into twisted knots whenever I thought about having to speak in class. I would get nervous already days ahead of an approaching presentation. Public speaking and fear were fused in my brain for the decades to come.

In high school, we were made to practice public speaking and when I needed to recite a speech, I would prepare with the devotion and skill of a stage actor, memorizing each word, each vocal inflection. No way could I forget even a string of words, for if I needed to be spontaneous, that's it, I would sound idiotic and surely would have nothing of interest to say. My only survival mechanism was intense, detailed preparation in which no room could be left for spontaneity.

Though I slowly lost my shyness and plunged headlong into being sociable from university onwards, I still feared any form of public speaking (even making a toast at a party) and developed other coping mechanisms: continued preparation and memorization, learning to disconnect from the present by switching my brain off, or just learning to act the part. (I needed to be part actor as the real me would certainly screw up.)

Such feelings/beliefs rarely go away entirely, and I still hear their voices on a daily basis, telling me to keep quiet or keep my head low. And yet to my great surprise, over the past years I am also able to make public presentations (sometimes in front of 75 or more people) and now am hosting regular tea demonstrations, tastings and meditative evenings which require presence, reflection—and *words!* What has happened over the years to allow me to relax into being comfortably spontaneous in front of more than one human at a time, and what indeed are these silly fears which stop us from interacting fully with the outside world?

I've been thinking of this topic a lot recently as we as a team here in Estonia are hosting more and more

tea drinking events, and I have noticed—in myself and others—many unspoken, sometimes unrealized personal fears which are blocking some from offering this gift to others, to avoid stepping up or to construct very comfortable, safe, limited ways of doing so. All of which just put barriers on our paths of self-development and of course prevent others from having a potentially beneficial, enjoyable experience.

So many of the fears which rule our lives and dictate our behavior (and most of them rule in complete stealth and impunity, unknown to the person being ruled) are not even our own. They are either part of lives we no longer live (we are no longer seven years old) or, more often, part of other people's lives, which we inherited through direct experience (or DNA telomere encoding!). What a dastardly clever mechanism! We pick up our parents' fears (of dogs, poverty, intimacy, saving face, abandonment, heights, etc.), adopt them as our own, and let them disrupt our lives in the process—and the lives of all those we touch. I often liken it to having been handed a heavy suitcase during early life by a friendly stranger who asks, "Would you pretty please carry this for a while?" Of course we oblige. And only 25 years later do we notice that we are still carrying it, and that it has made us a hunchback in the process. Once we realize we are carrying other people's limitations, isn't it time to set them down?

Of course, the first, massive step is realizing that this is the case. Our own fears and limitations are often impossible to see without keen, sober self-examination or simple clear sightedness, neither of which comes naturally to humans. We must work at it. In doing so, we can also see our own reluctance to give up these companions. As limiting as our fears are, they are also comfortable and familiar, and who has the time or bravery to step into the unknown when the familiar, even if it brings with it negative consequences, is so... easy? Like the necklace we've been wearing for years, we won't even notice it's there. And like the backpack we carry on hikes for endless hours, we stop feeling how it is making our journey slower, more laborious.

Once our limiting fears are at least partly visible to us, even if obscured by a fog of attachment, magical thinking or self-delusion, there are all sorts of things we can do to address them and experience the 'incredible lightness of being', which follows from their eventual disappearance. For example, we can step out of our comfort zones, give ourselves small, minimal-risk challenges as often as possible, be it to talk to strangers, tell someone



something intimate, sing or dance in front of someone, go up and pet that doggie—whatever. Jump into life! It won't bite! At least, it won't always bite. As difficult as it might seem at the time, the rewards are big-time and unexpected.

With regards to tea service, for any one of us who decides to listen to their inner voice telling them that the Universe would like them to serve tea to others now, pretty please, there are a few things we can do to help navigate our fears of serving.

**Just Do It.** Plain and simple. Set a date for a tea drinking session, invite people and simply do it, no matter what comes. Only by jumping in can you realize that the water is not as cold and deep and dangerous as your fears made you think.

**Make the sessions your own.** There need be no strict formula in serving tea. You are the magician of the session, so feel free to choose your own music (or lack of it), the tea, the setting, the incense, the structure of the session. Invite a friend over to play an instrument or recite poetry. Have everyone try a meditation or breathing technique you saw on YouTube. I don't mean that you must stuff your sessions with activities—ideally there would be the tea and nothing more—but my point is that for a time, you may occasionally, in order to become more comfortable, use certain ways of 'tricking' the self out of one comfort zone and into another.

**Stop feeling we need to be Wu De.** For any of us who have had the pleasure of assisting at a Wu De workshop, feeling that we need to follow up on that can be daunting. After Wu De left Estonia last year, I thought, "No point in me doing any tea events, as there's no way I can ever speak like that!" Well, as banal as it sounds, we all have our gifts to offer, and these need not be just like other people's gifts. Don't worry about not being anyone else, and focus on more fully being yourself. What is it that you have to offer others that is more uniquely yours? And please don't whimper that you have nothing to offer—that's not your voice, it's someone else's!

If it's the speaking part of the sessions that worries you most, simply arrange to do a minimum of speaking! Not too complicated. Make it a more meditative session. Set up a relaxing atmosphere, put on some beautiful music, and explain that you'd like to have a quieter session today. Doing this a few times will make your organism comfortable with the process and then, whenever words do come out of you, you're likely to experience them arising naturally, comfortably.

Alternately, if speaking spontaneously freaks you out, then read! When it comes time for words, read out passages of your favorite book (hopefully not *The Happy Hooker* or *Auto Repair For Dummies*). Reading a Zen koan, or from an Aaron Fisher or Eckhart Tolle book will take the onus off of you and still be meaningful for people. Do this until you feel more comfy in dropping your own pearls of wisdom.

Or, if it's the silence that scares you, make your first sessions more chatty and informative; that might

break through some of your fears and you can approach the more meditative aspects in future sessions.

No matter what the whimpering, scared child's voice inside you might try to tell you, the rewards of facing the world in this way and shedding past fears are massive. I am convinced of this not only from my own history, and not only from the testimony of a number of stellar TED Talks speakers or famous actors who also shared their stories of having once been stage shy. There are a number of people in my own entourage here, I am so deeply proud to say (so deeply there are tears welling up as I write), who have courageously pushed themselves beyond their fears and are now serving tea regularly to others, improving lives along the way. I can recall shaking hands pouring tea into cups, and thin voices questioning whether they are at all capable of handling public tea service. One friend who now makes a career out of public speaking would spend 15 minutes in a toilet talking to himself to still his beating heart before stepping onto a stage. Now he changes lives when he does. No one's life would be touched if he had stayed in the toilet, or stayed at home, or only drank tea alone.

One person I know enables the sneaky side of their fears to convince them that such public service need not be for every person on the planet, and therefore why should they do it? Why should a bumblebee become a lizard, or a carpenter an airline pilot? Why should people be forced against their will to do that which is not in the least bit their own? My answer is that this issue is not about an orchid being forced to become a potato; it's about an orchid becoming an orchid. Not just half of one.

Perhaps the only thing we're meant to do on this planet, in these bodies, is to dance the dance we're meant to dance—not other people's dances, our own. How many of us do this as fully, completely and as elegantly as we can? The Universe has likely led us along this tea path far enough for us to know that something is there for us; it's knocking at the door. Will we answer? Tea is calling to us. How long will we turn away? We have aspects of ourselves to share with others. How long will we keep them hidden?

Of course, there are many more sources of fear and possibilities to overcome than the ones I've mentioned here. Feel free to fill in your own blanks. Psychology books are filled with suggestion on how to master limiting fears. Yet if you are already reading this, chances are there is something in you which desires to reach out and share with others via the medium of tea. Thing is, it's not so scary to do so, after all.



**B**roadly, I would consider *chaxi* to be anything in the tea space that contributes to the energy of the session. This could include the things that are not on the table itself, as “tea space” means the whole room. But for the purposes of this article, we’ll focus on the elements that are on the table. *Chaxi* can be translated as “tea stage/theater”, and is often regarded as the “decoration” of the tea space, although I feel such an interpretation doesn’t do justice to what *chaxi* really can be. At its deepest, *chaxi* should be a reflection of one’s approach to tea.

We often talk about the way that Tea meets all kinds of people on all kinds of levels, from beverage, to hobby, to art, to Dao. At the beverage and hobby level, *chaxi* most likely isn’t even entering into the picture, or at least minimally so. When you meet someone that approaches their tea as an art-form, it will almost certainly be there, but such *chaxi* and the tea sessions that stem from them are not much more than studies in contrasting colors, composition, and matching the teapot and cups to the cloth and saucers. It is common for the tea to get lost amongst the aesthetics, because the *chaxi* is the center of attention, not the tea, and the quality of the teaware (and therefore the tea) will suffer as a result.

This is not to say that knowledge of composition and colors is bad. Without any feel for these subjects you will flounder. And it isn’t that I am averse to ornate tea cloths; I have quite a few. It’s just that if this is as far as your approach to *chaxi* goes, there won’t be a lot of transformation available to you as a result. It’s quite simple, really: Without an intention for transformation, there won’t be much transformation!

If your goal is to show off your aesthetics and please the eye, then the tea becomes more of an excuse for the *chaxi* to exist. The tea is in orbit around the *chaxi* in other words. With an intention for transformation however, the *chaxi* now orbits the tea. It’s a bit like the difference between a movie where the point is the special effects, and the actors and storyline are just vaguely added in to give them a reason to exist. Such movies are fun and entertaining, but we don’t leave wanting to change ourselves or the world very often.

But when a movie sets out to touch our hearts and souls, the actors and the script are where the money goes. In that way, my pot is chosen because it suits the tea, and *then* I can choose a cloth, not the other way around. The tea is the point, and the stage is in support. If any ingredient in this session can transform anyone, it is the tea, not

my ego’s amazing artistic talent! And as a practitioner of Cha Dao, transformation of myself, others and the world are always conscious intentions when I serve tea.

This is not meant to imply there is anything wrong with an artistic approach to tea. It only means that if transformation is your goal, tea as a Dao has greater potential. This is a beautiful quality of Tea, that no matter how we approach Her, She is there and wants to connect. This presents us with two opportunities: One is to follow the spirit of Tea, and connect gladly to fellow tea-lovers at whatever level they choose to approach Her. The other is to look down our noses at those who approach tea differently than we do.

Hopefully, we will choose connection instead. Personally, I approach tea in all of these ways, from time to time, and enjoy doing so. But, it is important to understand the consequences or effects, and the limitations of every approach. I can’t help feeling lucky that I do approach tea primarily in the fourth way, as a Dao, because I think it makes connecting with the entire spectrum that much more natural.

*Chaxi* can also be thought of as a means of welcoming guests, whether that guest is a friend, the tea, or perhaps your own higher self. This question of who is sitting down for this tea session is often the first one I ask myself before I begin. I also consider the kind of tea, and the brewing style.

If making bowl tea, a few rustic and rough elements are often appropriate, whereas *gongfu* tea generally demands a refined element or two. Having a theme in mind, such as a season, an emotion or a scene, also goes a long way towards taking a *chaxi* that simply ‘works’ into something that is really great. One of the best I have seen caught the essence of seasons changing from winter into spring. Another represented “calm joy”, and yet another was reminiscent of a flock of birds in the sky, to name a few.

### *The spirit of chaxi*

As for advice on how to arrange your *chaxi*, the only thing that really needs to be said is to let the spirit of Tea be your guide. Balance, simplicity and cleanliness are a good start. A table full of fancy items cheapens them all, whereas a single artisan piece draws attention and greater appreciation when contrasted with simpler elements. Don’t put a statue down at the end just because the space is empty, put it down because both your theme





*It's nice to lay out your chaxi items before selecting*

and the overall balance of the table demand it. Put it there because that statue represents the same spirit with which you plan to infuse this tea. The same with bonsai and flowers, or scattered flower-petals. Like a good piece of music, there should be space flowing between the notes, as well as moments of silence, and they all should be there for a reason or not be there at all!

Feeling obligated to fill all the space is a common mistake; so is going too far with color-matching everything, being unbalanced towards natural elements (rough wood and stones) or unbalanced towards manmade elements (metal and polished objects). The best way to avoid these pitfalls is to put everything down slowly, piece by piece.

Start by clearing the old *chaxi* away and cleaning the space. Sit down and meditate a few moments. I always sit down several times as the *chaxi* progresses. I take on the perspective of a guest, meditatively observing how this *chaxi* is influencing me, sensing distracting or unbalanced elements, and eliminating anything frivolous. One of the most important aspects of this is energetic. There should be a harmony present in the alchemy between all the elements that reaches in the same direction, without conflict.

In keeping with the spirit of tea, it is better to keep the *chaxi* as sparse and clean as possible. My advice is to start with the simplest of elements and make as

many different *chaxi* as you can, before beginning to incorporate decorations and optional elements.

Approach *chaxi* in the same way we approach bowl tea and *gongfu* tea in this tradition: Get in touch with the roots of Tea first. Originally it was just leaves and water in a bowl. Make very simple *chaxi* until you can find the transformative power in a stick, a scoop, a pillow and a cloth, and then go into the *gongfu*—the more elaborate stuff. Then, that simplicity of spirit will be the backbone of all your *chaxi*, the roots for it to grow out of, and your *chaxi* will always find its balance. If you open your mind, and don't approach your *chaxi* with predetermined ideas, allowing the spirit of Tea to be your guide, you'll find a world full of possibilities...



*“Those who cannot feel the littleness of great things in themselves, are apt to overlook the greatness of little things in others.”*

*—Kakuzo Okakura, “The Book of Tea”*



## BAISAO PART IV; MY TEA JOURNEY

BY NICK DILKS

This month, our pilgrimage with tea hero, Baisao, comes to an end, at least in the written form. The echoes of his life, the reflections and insights from reading his biography, and from Wu De's interview last issue, will continue to reverberate inside me for months and years to come. One of the main *koans* I have been aware of during this process is how to integrate the spirit of Baisao into these crazy times in which we live. And, of course, how to help pacify these crazy times through tea. I started off with many doubts that this was possible, but I am more optimistic that it can be done, indeed is being done within our tradition right now.

Of course, it is easy to idealize Baisao, to forget his early doubts about his path, or occasions where he nearly starved, or the excruciating back pain he suffered in old age, and sometimes the loneliness, too. Life was a lot less comfortable back then. There was no welfare to cushion people in old age or times of misfortune. Things could be tough, particularly for someone who had forsaken the buffer of family life. And yet, to live in a clean world where Nature was valued and embraced, where water was clean and the air still fresh, and where nobody needed to make the distinction of "organic" food or tea! We live in strange times of disconnection that I thought would probably leave a time-travelling Baisao scratching the few tufts of hair on his head in bewilderment: disconnection from self, from other and from the Nature and Spirit around us.

However, I believe that Baisao can be an inspiration for us all—in very practical ways—as we try to be a part of the change this world needs so badly. Personally, I come away from this encounter with Baisao full of admiration for the man's integrity and congruence, the way he embodied his ideals, even at the cost of acute hardship and suffering. In this age of insipid convenience, his life is exemplary. After all, most of us are in touch, however dimly, with the Dao, but how many of us have the courage and conviction to really *live it*? Baisao clearly spent many years thinking about the world and sought to change himself, so that he could live in line with his principals whilst serving others. He acts as a challenge to us to stop following the group and become who we really are. And Tea can be the transformative medium for this. I really liked what Wu De said in the interview when I asked him about Tea and non-conformity. He replied: "Tea is a liquid. It takes the shape of whatever it's in. It flows, it changes; it's dynamic, and that's what keeps things alive. If they're not changing, they're not growing, they're not

alive any more." As the poet Rilke once said: "For staying is nowhere."

Mostly, it is our craving for security that causes stagnation, whether this is sheltering in materialism or the security of group approval. Think of all the clutter in our lives compared to the simplicity of Baisao's! We sacrifice so much of our time working to earn extra dollars to attain this so-called security when we could be out more often, like him, drinking Tea with friends in Nature. There is also so much grasping onto the possessions we acquire when we could experience much more joy sharing with others. It's difficult, of course, to break these patterns. So much of modernity compels us to consume and hoard. I liked Wu De's advice in the interview when I asked him about the potential problem of *accumulation* of tea and teaware. He reminded me that in the absolute sense you can't really own anything, and proposed that our passion for tea can be a very powerful tool for working on craving, because this passion can lead us to "put all of our cravings in one basket", so we're not wanting and iPad one minute, then clothes the next, then a new car, etc. The message is that the more our life becomes 100% tea, the easier it is to integrate our desires, and therefore keep an eye on them. Wu De also recommended sharing our tea as a way of working with craving. As he pointed out, we may accumulate at first out of greed, but the more we serve tea, the more it becomes about how this teapot or tea can help me to serve others.

Baisao thought differently about the world. He saw that following the crowd leads to unhappiness. He saw that craving after material possessions caused suffering and he drove all his desires into his tea and serving tea to others. And this transformed him; actually, the time he spent with Tea transformed him. As Wu De said: "Tea takes us on a journey into ourselves, which is where the answers are. And resting in that space is our center, that's where we achieve mastery, which is about finding the place in you that meets the Universe and acting from there, so it is the power behind what you do. The Tao is making the tea, not you."

And, if Tea transforms us, it's quite natural that we will want to share that with others. After drinking tea for years in the monastery, this is what happened to Baisao. He wanted his tea to change others as it had changed him. But to do this, we must develop ourselves. I have to say that I loved what Wu De said about how our energy goes into our tea. I'm still new to this path, so I don't fully understand this. It is a more esoteric teaching,



but I do get a glimpse of what he means: how the bowl I serve is literally an expression of who I am, the level of consciousness I am in. And I find this a real inspiration to work on myself because I don't want to be serving my "delusions and afflictions" to others. I want to be able, like Baisao, to help others to "wake forever from their worldly sleep" through Tea. Wu De mentioned that he has some calligraphy near his bed that reads, "In every step, in every breath, from the moment I wake up until the moment I sleep, I'm preparing Tea", and I have really taken this to heart.

I need to wake up if I want to make a difference. And the world really needs to wake up. This was brought home to me the other evening when I sat at a railway station and a train pulled into the opposite platform. As you would expect, I glanced along the rows of silhouettes in the dark. Then, with a bolt of shock, something struck me as strange. Everyone—all forty people—were looking down at their mobile phones or tablets and tapping the screens with their fingers! It was like an eerie hybrid of *Brave New World* meets the *The Matrix*—this plugging into the *soma* of personalized technology. Many had plugged music into their ears, too; and if that wasn't enough satiated orifices, were either eating junk food or slurping liquid fructose from Styrofoam cups. Perhaps the Wachowski brothers' vision of human batteries was not as sci-fi as I'd thought.

I'm not sure if religion is the tool to snap us out of this slumber. I'm a Buddhist, so it's not that I don't value religion. But religion tends to divide people. As Wu De said in the interview: "Tea is Nature, so it transcends boundaries. This is ultimately why Tea is one of the most important medicines in the world today. Because it transcends sectarian boundaries. It transcends all worldviews. It doesn't matter what you believe in, Tea can be an asset for you to connect to Nature, to yourself, and to other people."

I think the main realization for me that came from chatting to Wu De is that, though the world is very different now, it is more possible to resurrect the spirit of Baisao than I had initially realized. My research and study had left me with a deep yearning for times of old: pure, purling rivers; braziers soughing in unspoiled bamboo groves; and tea under the phosphorescent, one moon. I must admit that I had resigned much of Baisao's life to bygone days. Surely, there were many episodes that would not be repeated in my lifetime, where so many of us have, in the words of one modern poet, Mary Oliver, "turned from this world/ gone crazy/ for power/ for things." But I was heartened throughout my conversation with Wu De at the number of parallels between our tradition and the Old Tea Seller of Kyoto. It's true that Nature was purer back then. However, like our tradition, Baisao found himself in times which had lost contact with the tea sages, and like us he awakened to a connection with them. He also had the same approach to Tea as we do: plant medicine, Nature and a path of self-cultivation. He believed that tea

should be shared freely, so, like us, he took his tea to the marketplace and gave it away without ideas of financial gain. He also shared it non-verbally as an expression of his Zen.

The resonances we have with Baisao are much stronger than I had thought. I was, in fact, underestimating what we do as a tradition. But isn't that the job of a teacher: to point out the ideal, so that the student can glimpse its beauty for a moment? I find myself feeling much more confident now that what we offer is not so distant from Baisao, even though our times may have fallen further from the Tao. I was very touched in the interview when I asked Wu De what he thought Baisao would have made of these modern times, half-expecting him to respond that Baisao might be overwhelmed. I was surprised to hear him say: "I think Baisao would find Tea is needed more than ever now. If he were alive now, he would get more busy serving tea, just as we are doing."



*Set up shop this time  
on the banks of the Kamo  
customers, sitting idly  
forget host and guest  
they drink a cup of tea  
their long sleep ends  
awakened, they realize  
they're the same as before.*

—**Baisao**

*I'm not Buddhist or Taoist  
not a Confucianist either  
I'm a brownfaced whitehaired  
hard-up old man.  
People think I just prowl  
the streets peddling tea,  
I've got the whole universe  
in this tea caddy of mine.*

—**Baisao**

# Tea Wayfarer

*Each month, we introduce one of the Global Tea Hut members to you in these magazines. We hope that this helps us all get to know each other better. It's also to pay homage to the many manifestations that all this wonderful spirit and tea are becoming, as the tea is drunk and becomes human. The energy of the tea fuels some great work in this world, and we are so honored to show you some glimpses of such beautiful people and their tea. This month we would like to introduce the talented **Aleksey Novgorodtsev**:*

My family has always appreciated good tea. I think it's because my parents spent the active part of their youths in the steppes and deserts of Central Asia, where I was born.

Therefore, I'd first like to pay tribute to the tea traditions of that region. As we may know from history, since ancient times there were important trade routes, by which countries from China to the Mediterranean traded silk, spices and tea. In the time of the Soviet Union—a time when my parents were living and working in the Kazakh desert—the vast majority of consumers only had access to two types of tea: Indian red tea and Chinese green tea. Sometimes green tea was available in bricks. And although green tea was not popular amongst the Russians or Europeans who lived there, the locals drank a lot of it.

In the typical day of a Central Asian person, the process of tea drinking holds a special, remarkable place. Whenever there is a gathering of people, which is often, and prior to any food, the host serves a tray of freshly brewed green tea and bowls. Such a starter cools down your body when it's hot (yup, hot tea helps us to cool down), and stimulates digestion, which is really helpful when eating a heavy meal. Growing up in a tea-loving atmosphere helped develop my appreciation of good tea, even as a kid.

Tea returned to my life in Moscow in the early 2000's. A good friend of mine was working in a tea club and introduced me to the universe of Chinese tea culture, which was growing in popularity amongst intellectuals there. It was fascinating: amazing and unusual puerh, incredible oolongs, a whole new world of green tea varieties, etc. And on top of that, plenty of cool “toys” with exotic names for gongfu tea. This opened up a huge world of tea, but it all lacked something...

The next milestone in my tea journey was in Tallinn. I started coming to this small, beautiful city in 2012 for work, and eventually settled here (at least for the next few years). Estonia is something really special. You can feel that people here are deeply connected to Nature—the seasons, weather, soil, etc. It seems that people here have discovered a special harmony with Nature, something that lends them a haste-less and meditative bearing.

So, it should come as no surprise that here, in Tallinn, you'll find one of the best tea places in the world, which is powered by Steve Kokker (contributor to this magazine) and his dream team. Thanks to them, last November I got the chance to meet Wu De and to participate in several workshops. At that point, the *Chajin* in me was awakened again.

As if that wasn't a happy enough ending of my story, less than two months later I found myself in Taiwan without any clear understanding why I was there. We had an amazing time together. The trip and the tea changed my life.

*If any of you are ever in Tallinn, look me up and we'll share some tea!*

[novgorodtsev@gmail.com](mailto:novgorodtsev@gmail.com)





# Inside the Hut

## ***Global Tea Hut sessions around the world:***

- In Los Angeles, there are Global Tea Hut events every Thursday at 6 PM and Sunday at 9:30 AM. To reserve a spot, email Colin at [livingteas@gmail.com](mailto:livingteas@gmail.com).
- In Barcelona, Spain, Global Tea Hut member Antonio holds tea events each month at Caj Chai Teahouse. The next Global Tea Hut event is on May 3rd at 9:45. Contact him at [info@cajchai.com](mailto:info@cajchai.com) for more info.
- In Moscow, Russia, there are frequent tea events. Contact Tea Hut member Ivan at [teeabai@gmail.com](mailto:teeabai@gmail.com) for details.
- In Nice, France, GTH member Sabine holds regular tea events at the tearoom Les Causeries de Blandine. You can email her at [sabine@letempsdunthe.com](mailto:sabine@letempsdunthe.com).
- In Darwin, Australia, Sam (who you may remember from February's *Tea Wayfarer* article) holds GTH tea events on Fridays at 6 PM. Email him at [sdsgibb@gmail.com](mailto:sdsgibb@gmail.com).

## ***Our goals for the coming year:***

- Increase membership to 2,000 by January 1st, 2015
- Hire an architect and begin building in 2015
- Incorporate Global Tea Hut in Taiwan so we can offer Taiwanese visas to foreign volunteers

## ***Ways in which Global Tea Hut will continue to improve as we get near our goals:***

- As you may have noticed, we recently switched to full-color magazines. Yay!
- At 1,000 members, we'll start traveling more to research articles on tea and teaware, and to source new and different organic teas. As an awesome side-effect, this will allow us to connect organic farmers to each other and to you!
- At 1,500 members, we'll start translating modern and ancient Chinese and Japanese tea wisdom to English. In many cases, these will be the first translations of major Asian tea texts into English!

## ***How you can help:***

- Follow us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).
- Use social media and email to share our videos, our links and membership to Global Tea Hut. Post photos of your tea sessions and GTH envelopes. Spread the word to people who may benefit from membership as much as you do!
- Share each month's tea with friends. Show them the newsletter and tell them why you love your subscription. Tell them we need 2,000 members this year to begin construction on the world's best free tea center.



## ***Center News***

- Before you visit, check out the center's website ([www.teasagehut.org](http://www.teasagehut.org)) and read about the schedule, food, what you should bring, etc.
- Wu De returned from a trip to Los Angeles early in April. We're glad to have him back home for a while!
- Colin "The Hudonator" Hudon took precepts on 1/9! His tea name is *Qing Yu* (清愚), which means "Clear Fool". On the surface, it means "clearing away foolishness"; deeper still it expresses the essential Daoist ideal of a wise, but simple life; and finally, for those of us who know *Qing*, he is sometimes "clearly a fool". Still, we can call him "*Qing*" most days...
- Wu De will be in LA from 3/18 to 4/3 doing workshops and some larger events. All the proceeds will go to the new tea center that is opening there! For event details, contact us.
- From now on, we will be posting videos every month with each new magazine! We hope to include some more info about the teas, as well as some brewing tips. Feel free to contact us at [globalteahut@gmail.com](mailto:globalteahut@gmail.com) with any questions we can answer for you.

You must be completely awake in the present to enjoy the tea. Only in the awareness of the present, can your hands feel the pleasant warmth of the cup. Only in the present, can you savor the aroma, taste the sweetness, appreciate the delicacy. If you are ruminating about the past, or worrying about the future, you will completely miss the experience of enjoying the cup of tea.

-Thich Nhat Hanh

