

In brewing gongfu tea it is important to know what makes a tea fine, which can for the most part be applied to water, teaware and tea-brewing methods as well. Master Lim always says, “If and until you try a fine tea, it’s too hard to tell!” This means that tasting is experiencing. We can, however, briefly describe some of what makes a fine tea great, though it won’t replace tasting teas of many different quality levels to develop your palate.

Fine teas should have no off-notes. The liquor should be clear and vibrant. Each stage in the processing should enhance the tea without leaving a trace of itself. The same goes for tea preparation—and mastery in all things, actually. If you taste the roast it wasn’t roasted masterfully, in other words.

The best teas splash up to the upper palate when they enter the mouth and slide back effortlessly. There is no need to consciously swallow a fine tea, and the very best teas seem to magically disappear down the throat, with no swallowing sensation to speak of. They are comfortable and smooth in the mouth, with a soft, billowy consistency. The best teas tend to conglomerate in the mouth, and are thick like oil. Fine tea also coats the mouth, and you can feel the tea everywhere—anywhere your attention travels. They make us salivate, quenching our thirst.

Great teas travel slowly up the back of the nasal cavity, filling our sinuses with a lovely bouquet of fragrance that is long-lasting. The tea’s taste and fragrance also return on our breath (called “hui gan” in Chinese) for some time after drinking. The longer the aroma lasts, the better the tea, of course. The best teas linger for hours, in the cups and in our mouths/breath.

A fine tea should feel good in our body, with excellent energy that flows all around, calming and relaxing us—communicating to us about non-duality. Fine tea opens us up to Nature, speaking of sun, moon, stars, clouds, weather and earth. Our own Qi starts flowing and blockages are often broken through, bringing great peace afterwards.

Of course, even teas that don’t meet all these criteria can be elevated through better water, teaware and brewing skills. And that, too, is much of what gongfu tea is all about: taking whatever tea and brewing it in a way that takes it to its greatest potential. We preserve all that a tea has to offer in that way, which is one of many ways of showing respect to Tea...



