

# Tea Wayfarer

Each month, we introduce one of the Global Tea Hut members to you in these issues in order to help you get to know more people in this growing international community. 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 Tea fuels some great work in this world, and we are so honored to share glimpses of such beautiful people and their Tea. This month, we would like to introduce MJ Greenmountain.

On a balmy day in February of 1997, caught between cicadas, crickets and Hawaiian breezes, I found myself awestruck in a friend's lava-rock Zen garden as he quietly poured a dark, loamy shou puerh from a Purple-sand teapot into two tiny cups. I sat upright, mute, motionless and transfixed. He had poured tea for me a couple of times before, yet this time it was *different*. Time stood still, and every cell of my being said: "Take heed, something huge is happening." We raised our cups to the sky, and drank. Then he laughed, delighted by my utterly stunned face. I'd been kidnapped by a leaf. "I need this in my life," I said reflexively. From that moment on, Tea became an essential part of my daily meditation practice.

From early on, I maintained my own "Traveler's Tea-room": fresh spring water, puerh, an Yixing pot and old porcelain cups (packed with tea towels inside a clean camping kettle), a small wooden tray, a thermos, a camp stove, a quartz crystal, and a folding grass mat—all to facilitate tea anywhere, anytime.

In 2001, I met the "Old Man," my first tea-cher. He's well versed in all the traditional tea arts: gongfu, *chanoyu*, ceramics, incense, history, poetry, and so on. He'd whip out little folded pieces of paper with treasure-poems, antique "scholar's pieces" and mesmerizing tea, intermittent with razor-sharp remonstrations and sucker punches right to the old ego. The time we spent left an indelible mark on my life, though I never expected the extent of divine gifts Tea would bring into my life.

Indeed, many years after that, sitting in my Traveler's Tearoom under a giant tree in the wilds of New Zealand, a Japanese woman and I dropped in deeply over many hours and countless cups of puerh. It was "love at first sip." Tea has since become the hub of our shared daily life; and six years of marriage and two young kids later, it's now a daily family affair.

As destiny would have it, our first time traveling together to Taiwan, my wife and I met Wu De, who had spontaneously offered to fetch us from the airport in Taipei. We were touched by his humble generosity.

After our first tea session together, which also happened to be on my birthday, Wu floated a simple yet piercing question my way: "Why not adopt a vegetarian diet, and seriously upgrade your tea practice?" And *boom*—like a lightning strike, the epiphany came. Instant change occurred. That was the initiation of our yearly visits to the Tea Sage Hut, and the blossoming of a serious love for Taiwanese tea culture.



Just this past summer, my family moved to a new home on a spacious breathtaking property, overtly styled like a Japanese country estate, in a park-like setting, complete with pond and gushing stream. These days, I host people of all kinds—local folks, elders, high-schoolers, gang-bangers, foreign tourists, bikers, hippies, tech geeks, the Republican Hair-do Clan—all somehow showing up with interest in discovering Tea, whether they knew it or not. The depth of gratitude we feel for this mysterious and wise Leaf is just unfathomable. The more one dives into tea, the more profound life becomes. And then this practice starts changing the lives of those around us as well, which is real magic.

A few months back, I routed my music tour to pay a surprise visit to the "Old Man" who introduced me to Tea after not seeing him for five years. I laid out my grass mat beneath a redwood tree just outside his reclusive door. "Oh, you found my tea room. I've been looking for it!" he said. Pushing back tears, I quietly prepared tea for him, as he beamed his sweet, toothless, octogenarian smile, and kept sighing, "perfect, just perfect." This time, no criticisms ensued. The tea was enough.

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