

Global Tea Hut Expansion Packs

EXPANSION V: SHOU PUERH TEA

We've developed a new and exciting way to expand your tea education. If this trial run works and you find these expansions fulfilling, we plan to offer three or four of them a year. Each will come with two or more teas that expand upon the topics we are covering in that issue, allowing you to taste more, rarer and sometimes higher quality examples, in order to learn more about various genres of tea.

This month, we are offering a very special Expansion Pack. Puerh is abundant in Taiwan, as so much of it was shipped here from Hong Kong in the 1980s and '90s. We are spoiled with options. We wanted to share some of our all-time favorite shou puerh teas with you, so you can learn more about the genre and the ways that shou puerh production has shifted, then till now.

Most loose-leaf shou puerh teas are blended. In fact, almost all loose puerh is blended, full stop. And we don't mean blended during production to create a more balanced brew, though most puerh since 1972 is created in that way as well—we mean added to over time to increase weight, change the flavor (often to make the tea seem older than it is) or to create a unique tea that separates the shop selling the tea from the source.

It is consequently impossible to date loose-leaf puerh tea. You should never, ever use the date of a loose-leaf puerh given by a vendor as the measure of whether to purchase the tea or not!

There may be some basis in truth in the date, but usually the date increases as the tea is sold from person to person. Most old loose-leaf sheng puerh is a blend of some older tea, younger wet-stored tea and a little shou. Overall, these teas taste fine. They should be evaluated based on their own merits and bought accordingly. In other words, a tea lover must compare loose-leaf puerh to other loose-leaf puerh and develop a sense of quality and price. This is why we encourage friends with tea shops to create a nomenclature for aged, loose-leaf puerh based on terms that they can use consistently, like "aged," "well-aged," "vintage," etc., and each term then corresponds to a certain flavor profile and quality/price. This is a much better approach to the world of loose-leaf aged puerh.

Storage also plays a huge role in aged loose-leaf puerh. One of the reasons cakes age so much better than loose-leaf puerh is that there is too much oxygen in and around loose-leaf tea, which means it oxidizes/ferments too fast. There is nothing wrong with

some wetter storage, within reason, so long as the price reflects the condition of the tea. This is as it should be with any antique—the price is determined, in large measure, by the condition of the object.

One of the main reasons that the two loose-leaf puerh teas we are offering in this expansion pack are among our all-time favorite shou teas is that they are unblended, original tea stored by a Hong Kong merchant and a Taiwanese collector. Nothing was added to them over time. They are the same tea that was packaged by the factory, so they provide a standard for all loose-leaf shou puerh that can help you navigate the world of loose-leaf puerh. Also, the storage was immaculate, as they were in sealed bags on the third floor of a building. Wu De named Bindbole, after the oldest forest in the Shire, since he grew up with *Lord of the Rings*. It is an early-1980s shou made of second-grade leaves (mostly buds) from large-leaf trees. "Shaman's Drum" is a similar tea, only younger and less deep (we suspect it's from the late '80s).



茶 1990s Cake (*The Cake with No Name*)



茶 7572 Cake (mid '80s)



茶 Shaman's Drum (late '80s loose-leaf)



茶 Bindbole (early '80s loose-leaf)



We have also gotten a few cakes of one of the best shou cakes of all time, a mid-1980s 7572 from Menghai Tea Factory. Though you only get a single steeping of this treasured tea due to the high prices, it is worth having a reference session, since this is one of the greatest shou teas ever produced.

Then there is a mid-1990s cake for comparison. We cannot be sure of the recipe for this one, as the papers have been lost. This is common for that era, since Taiwan could not import directly from China. Since the wrappers said “China” on them, they were removed after the tea passed through Hong Kong or Vietnam. This is also a spectacular aged shou.

Finally, we have included the cake version of the Tea of the Month, “Spirit,” which is one of our Light Meets Life fundraiser cakes this year. This will allow you to experiment with the differences between loose-leaf and compressed tea.

These five teas will leave you with a very comprehensive grasp of the world of shou puerh through time.

Here's what comes in this month's expansion pack:

50 grams of Bindbole (early '80s loose-leaf shou)

50 grams of Shaman's Drum (late '80s loose-leaf shou)

15 grams of mid '80s 7572 shou puerh cake

25 grams of a mid '90s shou puerh cake

25 grams of the cake version of our very own “Spirit”

This expansion is a bit more than previous ones, as it includes so much aged tea, but, as usual, this is not a fundraiser, but rather an educational opportunity, so we have not marked up the teas: \$65 + shipping

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