

# TEA IN THE SOUTH OF FRANCE

Sabine Minh Sen

*It is always nice to read about our events from the perspective of those who attended them, rather than from behind the scenes. Sabine has collected a nice montage of what she calls “tributes”, since they express a newfound gratitude and joy.*



茶禪

I discovered the Tea Sage Hut in November of 2013. I had been looking on the Internet for a bed and breakfast in Taiwan, adding “tea” to the search. I was lucky to drink tea with Wu De, Kai Ya, Shane, Lindsey and Nick. These strangers soon became my Tea family. My two short days there radically changed my perspective. At the time, we discussed Wu De coming to Nice in the south of France. And here we are one year later living this experience! Wu De arrived in Nice with the delightful Antonio Moreno of the Čaj Chai Tea House in Barcelona.

France is the home of gastronomy and we have a reputation for having fine palates. Nice is an attractive tourist city, very close to Italy, where we are more used to drinking coffee than tea. People come to Nice for its wonderful climate, its beaches and the beauty of the hinterland. Mountains and snow are just a one-hour drive away. The beauty of our environment has us used to receiving abundance without any effort. In the midst of this superficial activity, where tea is an unknown culture, I have paved the way, from workshops at the Museum of Asian Arts to gatherings around tea and creative writing in the old part of town. I live somewhere balanced between pro-

moting and selling tea and my deep passion for the Leaf. I am always in search of expressions to convey the wealth and depth of this culture and was therefore gratefully awaiting Wu De’s visit to help me come even closer to this plant, to share the taste of this medicine. All was perfect, since his dates coincided with the launch of his book “Tea Medicine”.

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The lovely Anne-Marie, a living encyclopedia on tea, came from Belgium to help us organize the events. And there followed two days of encounters at different venues: an estate agency with a yoga room upstairs, a friendly co-working office, at my home for a vegetarian teenager, on the most beautiful beach in Nice early one morning...

Hardly anyone knew what a tea master was, other than a vague idea of a ceremony in a Kimono. Every tribute written at the end of this article and every photograph taken of the events shows a huge surprise, an intense encounter that often began in silence. Humor, entertaining anecdotes and Wu De’s deep knowledge of Tea punctuated our exchanges. He passes on the wisdom of Tea by being and incarnating it in his daily life. His hugs are communicative and loving. Without asking for anything for himself he touched us, each one of us in a different way—one of us by the tea, the other by a numbered puerh cake, or his original drawings, Global Tea Hut bracelets, Zen, or the sharing of the experience of the Global Tea Hut community, all the stories he told...

He challenged us to drink three bowls of tea every morning first thing before becoming absorbed in our daily activities. Some have told me how much this has already changed their lives, as it has mine. It helps clear away the interference between us and what is essential, helping us to connect with what is within or quite simply to let go of the reflex that pushes us to look at our screens the moment we get up.

Meeting Wu De has helped reinforce my purpose, to continue on my path, to worry less about how I can earn a living and to intensify my tea practice. I am looking for continuity and regularity in my exchanges and for this I had to remove myself from the stress of “doing business”. Following Wu De’s visit I am pursuing his ambition to create more free tea sessions in different places around town. The Global Tea Hut experience has been a great help to me. I feel a part of this wonderful embracing community. A film director, Raphael Zamochnikoff offered to film the Nice gatherings with Wu De. His art will be helpful in order to continue demonstrating the benefits of Tea for humanity. All of this revolves around being in harmony with oneself, others and Nature.

Thank you, Wu De, for dedicating your life and soul to this cause. I feel stronger now to bring my own contribution to this human adventure and the feeling of solitude on my tea path has completely left me.

*The tea ceremonies themselves were translated into French and then these tributes into English by Vanessa Gheorghiu:*

**Raphaël Zamochnikoff:** I was very impressed by the simplicity of Wu De’s stories. They were really easy to understand, and everything seemed so obvious. There was one unexpected aspect. I was wondering what it meant to be a tea master, and he answered that for me. The group energy came into being very easily, concentration, sharing, etc. What will stay with me are the hugs, the new feeling of community. This struck me. A magical power of authority, a kindness that was not seeking power—lots of quiet, we took our time—Wu De is present and his contact is warm. Monastic calm can be daunting; it’s a silence that asks for nothing. The medium of Tea creates a link between peo-

ple. We use an ordinary pretext as a social tool. Wu De shares his beliefs, a respectful silence surrounds us. A door opens.

**Nicolas Bergé:** It was an intense presence. I especially loved the man/Tea in silence before listening to the master and learning from his knowledge. Such an intense silence. This corresponds to my true nature and to my taste for Asian arts. I found Wu De sincere and brilliant. Wu De encouraged us to listen. I was delighted that he chose to come to the “Satellites” (a communal office

space). There was a transversal quality to it. Never mind the place; it’s what happened inside that counts. The place is secondary compared to the people who are present. There were three consequences of sharing this tea: As Wu De said, we connect to our environment, ourselves and others. I agree 100-million%.

**Donatella Anzalone:** Friendly, sometimes silent, a voyage of discovery; these are the words that come to mind. Actually, I found the experience very interesting for several reasons: first the master himself; it





### *A stunning morning on the Riviera*

is always impressive to meet such a person. Then the ceremony in itself, during which the silence around us creates a silence within (meditation actually); and then third, Wu De's teachings, which were simple yet true. As for the Tea, Spirit flows through its powerful flavor, so light and so deep at the same time.

**Rosa Jackson:** It's hard to find words to describe the experience of meeting Wu De, since much of what he teaches is about the value of not speaking, not doing, just being. The first time I attended one of his sessions, we drank several bowls of tea in silence before he started to speak, and I found myself wondering whether he had anything to say at all. Then he began talking about health and it all made perfect sense. I learned many things with Wu De, but what will stay with me the most is the habit of drinking three bowls

of tea in the morning before doing anything else. By the time I have finished drinking my tea, it no longer seems urgent to check the messages on my phone or open my laptop, and I am able to concentrate better on each task throughout the day. With him I learned that Tea, despite

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its caffeine content, can be a means to access a state of inner calm, and I now use it throughout the day to create moments of peace. After one session with Wu De, my 12-year-old son is doing the same! I was excited to receive my first issue of Global Tea

Hut last week and have been savoring the articles just as I do my morning tea.

**Adele Stefanoni:** A beautiful, significant encounter!

**Jérémie Atlani:** A particularly rich and moving moment. Wu De is a model of calm and spirituality. The ceremony begins plunged in complete silence, savoring the first bowls of tea. Wu De serves us tea in all simplicity and humility. The first part of the ceremony leads to meditation, the second to dialogue and exchange. A beautiful experience. Thank you.

**Vanessa Gheorghiu:** Sharing time and drinking tea with Wu De turns minutes into the most precious of moments. Moments to learn and reflect on how to navigate these

times, to delve deep into ourselves for a better understanding of our true nature and how we are being called to change from within. His deep understanding of Zen philosophy, his warm and engaging personality, his delightful sense of humor all contributed to an unforgettable experience. Thank you Wu De and Sabine for bringing love, light and joy into our lives.

**Catherine Montana Thu:** What stayed most with me was the feeling of an intimate connection created in this small gathering of people who didn't know each other a few moments earlier. I arrived a little late, and could feel that there had been a real meeting, beyond words. The atmosphere in the room was dense when I entered. What really struck me was the image of the ancient centennial trees whose roots are connected to the past and connected to each other—a discovery for me. There was a real impression of stability, echoed by the master himself, in all his being.

**Silvain Leone:** Restful and energizing—a good booster for those of us who are constantly on the go, a beautiful moment in his company. I would recommend this and do it again.

**Anne-Marie Vandervodt:** I will always remember those wonderful days in Nice. Since I met my tea sister Sabine last year in Taiwan, she and her big heart haven't stopped sharing tea moments, laughs, and a never ending vessel of chocolate spread! In the black days when my German friend suddenly died—a drummer in a cover band whose heart stopped beating—intuition between tea friends has worked and even though Sabine didn't know exactly what was going on, she sent me a whole box of my favorite French jams from *La Chambre des Confitures*. Then,

she invited Wu De to Nice so we could learn what Tea really is.

A lot of French people found real tea happiness, and I did as well. I came to understand more deeply what I had read before in Wu De's books. I understand and feel now what it means to live in the HERE and NOW.

Nice *was* connection to others, in silence or not. It was so nice to meet people like Antonio, Raphaël and Jean. It was also connection to Nature through the tea leaves, fire,

earth and water Wu De put in the tea we drank together and in the blue sky, sea, and air of the *Côte Azur*. And the connection to myself, a 50+-year-old red-haired tea lover, started. I'm proud to continue my tea path and be a GTH member!!!



Sabine showing off our 2014 Ai Lao cake to guests

