

Tea Wayfarer

Each month, we introduce one of the Global Tea Hut members to you in these magazines 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 the 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 Stephanie Ayres:

It was upon coming back to Falmouth in the southwest of England for my second year of studying illustration that I was introduced to a beautifully adorned, small shop that seemed to slip by unnoticed for most of the general public. It was where I was to find a peaceful sanctuary; it was where I discovered Tea.

The small shop in question was The Essence of Tea run by David and Kathy Collen. I feel blessed to have been given a year and a half to experience tea drinking in such a beautiful way, and what an incredible bonus that it was on my doorstep. From first sip, I was in love. I think the first proper tea that I tasted was a 2010 Sun Moon Lake, on a balmy September afternoon. To this day, Hong Shui & Shui Xian remain some of my favorites, and the taste of delicious 1980's bamboo *tuocha* just will not leave my memory.

I jumped at the chance to learn more about tea, and was given that opportunity in the form of attending an evening tea class every week. I have to say that at that point, I was more focused on writing notes than being fully present with the teas. However, it is worth reminding ourselves that when we catch ourselves being not fully present, that we are all constantly learning how to be with ourselves, and with Tea.

During my illustration degree, it was a place of refuge, and as I always had my trusty sketchbook to hand, inevitably, I took to drawing the teaware and my surroundings. I loved all the different textures. Eventually David and Kathy asked me to illustrate the wrappers for their 2012 Puerh teas. It was such an honor to have my work nestled up against Tea, and I am forever grateful to have had that opportunity.

It was with a heavy heart that I said goodbye to the tea shop when it closed. Drinking tea from the 1920's in the last tea ceremony in that shop was one I will never forget (although the name of the tea escapes me!) In particular, a moth landing on my nose nearing the end of the evening brought smiles and joy into my heart.

Since then, I've fallen in love with teaware. I sat spellbound, watching Master Zhou Qi Kun craft a teapot in under two hours, along with Master Lin's evocative commentary. I will forever remember the likening of the handle of the teapot to the reins of a horse, having to rein in the energy from the spout of the teapot



and create balance. Poetry such as this can only melt the heart. I have since attended pottery classes, and made some very rudimentary slab-built teapots. It is my wish that some day I can find someone to apprentice under, so that I can learn this art more fully, and create a lid that actually fits! (Just how they manage it is beyond me.)

Tea has always brought me home, and given me a sense of peace and comfort. It has connected me back to myself and the Earth, and opened my heart once again. I wish to continue to deepen my rudimentary knowledge of Tea, falling deeper and deeper in love.

May we all fall in love with Tea and each other, more and more with each passing cup.

Stephanie's beautiful, tea-inspired artwork is this month's gift. We have made some small prints of a few of our favorites. You can use them as decoration or even as a postcard.