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茶席

## ELEVATING A CHAXI AN ELEVATION ARRANGEMENT

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*Continuing our series on setting the stage for tea, we thought that this month it would be nice to explore a very specific chaxi for one event. Now that we have covered several of the general principles that go into arranging a stage for tea and some of the elements you will need, the next step in learning chaxi is to watch as experienced Chajin arrange for specific events. Here we see what goes on in the mind of a Chajin preparing to host a tea gathering.*

If you've ever visited the Tea Sage Hut before, even for one day, you have a good idea just how abundant the Center schedule can be. From early morning meditation sessions, followed by healthy vegetarian meals, tea ceremonies and lectures, service periods, afternoon tea with guests, to our final evening meditation, our days are rich in opportunities to participate, learn and serve. People become really inspired by this way of life and often want to incorporate many aspects of it into their own daily lives. They want to maintain a meditation practice, create a tea space, serve tea to themselves, family, and friends, start practicing making *chaxi* and arranging flowers, eat a lighter, healthier diet conducive to a life of tea, and on and on it goes. In a tradition of service, we want to help facilitate that shift towards healthier living in whatever way we can, and, of course, for us, that often means through tea.

One way to show people just how easy it can be to invite Tea into their lives is to start them off with the simple brewing method of bowl tea paired with some Sun Moon Lake red tea, which we have so lovingly come

to know as "Elevation." It's an excellent tea for all tea lovers, but especially beginners learning bowl tea. The twisted shape and large size of the loose leaves makes them perfect for simply placing in a bowl and adding hot water. The aroma and flavor are rich and patient from steeping to steeping. Red teas like this are excellent to drink throughout the year, particularly in the morning to wake us up in a calm and balanced way. It's a wonderful example of a large-leaf tea varietal and what we call a "living tea." There's also the rich history and beauty of Sun Moon Lake. And for many more reasons, it is simply an amazing tea to start people off with and to continue drinking into our old age!

In light of this month's issue and the more general *chaxi* concepts we've covered in previous issues, I thought it would be nice to design a very specific *chaxi* geared towards serving Elevation in a bowl and turning people on to tea! As it turns out, we have two new guests visiting the Tea Sage Hut this Monday. After we've cleaned the entire Center for their arrival, they will experience their first tea ceremony

and Cha Dao tea class on Tuesday morning after meditation and breakfast. In preparation for the day's tea session, I have completely cleared and cleaned the main tea table. Remember, one of the essential aspects of designing our *chaxi* is to honor the guests and the occasion itself. I have two guests from very different parts of the world, both new to the Way of Tea, and in order to inspire them through tea, I have found it suitable to the occasion to design a *chaxi* specifically for serving Elevation in a bowl. For so many of the reasons mentioned above, I feel Elevation will be a perfect tea to help welcome and inspire our new guests into our tea Center. Of course, this specific *chaxi* will only suit this occasion. It is one creative impulse from one tea lover. Still, I think that since we have covered some of the basics of *chaxi* arrangement in previous issues, it is now helpful to take a peek into actual application, as this will help you to find your own process. I learned much of what I know about arranging *chaxi* from watching my teacher go through his process for various sessions at the Center and tea events elsewhere.

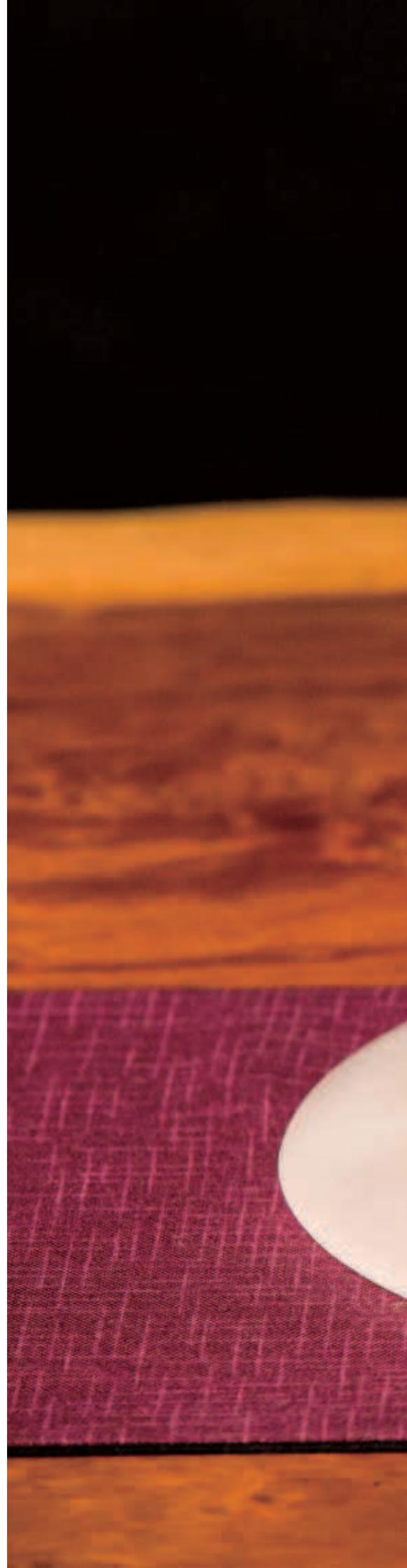


For this Elevation arrangement, I already know what type of tea is suitable for the occasion and my guests. I know what type of brewing method to use and my theme is chosen: inspiration into a life of tea! I know the elements within my design should be especially simple, in such a way that focuses all our attention on the tea! After all, Elevation will be the carrier of the theme. With a clean tea table at my disposal, I first sit quietly before taking any specific action. Since I am setting up for original bowl tea (leaves in a bowl), there won't be any tea pot at the center of the stage, and since the tea is so important for this design, I envision an abundant display of tea leaves, resting in an elegant bowl, awaiting my guests before they sit down. Having a clear vision is important. The more vivid it is, the smaller the gap becomes between what you imagine and what you actually create. I want the display of tea leaves to be further highlighted by contrasting the bowl against a runner, so I need to consider the color, shape, and texture of these elements. I feel there won't be much more necessary beyond that, except perhaps one small highlight, as I want our guests to see how such an ordinary design can lend itself to such an extraordinary experience. Hopefully, they also feel confident enough to design their own *chaxi* after seeing how simple it can be.

After careful consideration, I chose one of our beautiful ceramic tea bowls to display the leaves in, resting atop a round, glass tea pillow. I contrasted the centerpiece against an elegant, purple runner. Purple can be a very royal color, symbolizing the very loftiness and elevation that this tea excites within us, and even possibly reminding us that we are all regal! At this point, I sat in both the positions of the guest and the host to make sure things felt balanced and focused. This is always a tricky crossroads, where you either decide to add something, take something away, or start over! More often than not, my teacher will remove something or slightly adjust the placement of one element. In this case, however, I went against the trend and with my intuition and added something: a fake,

albeit beautiful, butterfly. I stood back and took a glance. I even left the room, let my eyes adjust to a different light, and came back in to see where my attention fell, and I felt this addition was just what was needed. It somehow removed the dissatisfaction I'd had before and highlighted the centerpiece even more without drawing attention away from the tea. It also added another very complementary symbol to the theme—for what is more inspiring than the transformative process of becoming a butterfly, changing form *completely* and transcending a physical limitation altogether.

As an added bonus of designing this *chaxi*, I was again reminded of tea as something both simple and extraordinary. I had to focus my attention on some small details in order to create this stage, and it really is those small details in accumulation that make a big difference. Bowl tea itself is also a very simple brewing method and asks us to accept things just they are—in all their simplicity—and when we actually do that, while still paying attention to the details, we find that there is a great sense of depth and connection over a simple bowl of tea! And so I pass this next bowl of tea out to all of you, raising it high when finished, in gratitude for this global tea session.



# 超越形而下

