

夕陽茶亭

# SETTING SUN TEA HUT UNDER THE MOON

茶人: Ben Youngbaer

*When you hear about a Global Tea Hut member setting out to build his own tea hut in America, you feel moved to visit such spaces and eventually make your own tea space a bit nicer. Ben's story is inspiring. It's one of the best we've shared in this magazine, as it shows that the more you put into your tea practice, the more it changes you and those around you. If the world had the heart of Ben, and a few more tea huts, it would be a merrier place, indeed!*

Last fall, I embarked on a project with my dad that has forged a new chapter in my tea life. Once a flutter of a grand idea and before long an attainable reality: my own tea hut. Named “Setting Sun Tea Hut” because it faces west where the sun sets over the glorious green mountains, and also because we are on the opposite side of the Earth from “the land of the rising sun” so I thought it to be quite fitting, since it is modeled after Japanese tea huts.

My dad and I cut some cedar posts from our woods to serve as the corner posts as well as the rafters. Our construction began the next day and lasted only about ten full work days before the last shingle was placed. Not only does this hut allow for a space dedicated to tea, it also gives me the opportunity to share tea with friends, family, neighbors and strangers alike. To mark the completion of the Hut (although not fully complete), I had an opening on October 3<sup>rd</sup> of last year with many past, present and future Global Tea Hut members—many of us in Vermont, but also some tea friends from New York and New Jersey.

Over the many months since the opening, I have had small gatherings mostly involving Japanese tea ceremony (*chanoyu*). I prepare the charcoal and the tools needed for the ceremony. Even in the coldest moments (this winter was rather mild), a bowl of matcha will warm and sooth the soul. This month I had an open (tea) house where I offered a spring *chanoyu*, switching from the sunken hearth to the standing brazier and also sharing April's tea of the month—Moonlight White.

I first encountered this tea on my trip to China in 2012. We heard the legend of the moonlight drying and accepted it to the same extent we accept Bodhidharma ripping off his eyelids and tea trees growing up as a result. When a tea is good, it almost doesn't matter the legend or flowery language used to sell it. Often we recognize a good tea as being easy to brew as well as being durable and suitable for long tea sessions. This tea of the month certainly fits the bill of a quality tea that is easy to enjoy.

Throughout my event, people came and went at various times; some had matcha when they arrived and some

had Moonlight White first. Sometimes the water was just under boiling and the tea brewed a rich amber color, and other steepings the water had cooled as the coals died down and the liquor moved to a more yellow tint. Cup after cup, we sipped in relative silence, the sun creeping through the door and casting rays over the *chaxi* on the center of the tatami mats. I passed the magazine around so we could read about the tea as we were drinking. Another Global Tea Hut member, Julia, said she hadn't tasted the tea yet so she could taste with us in the hut. Thanks Julia! I'm glad you had the willpower to wait to share with us!

As much as I enjoy drinking the tea every month, it always tastes better when I share it with others. For one, it allows for shared experience, and for that reason I put up a scroll in the *tokonoma* (alcove). It reads: “*Ichi-go Ichi-e* (One encounter, one chance).” The tea hut feels complete when the coals are glowing, the kettle humming and the aromas of tea and incense filling the room. With guests or even if it's just me (or sometimes my cat), the purpose of the space is fulfilled



when tea is flowing. Every time I sit in the hut for tea, a new experience and memory is created. I don't need to have the scroll hanging for this to be true it only serves as a reminder not to take the moment for granted.

Even though I have a tea hut, a space dedicated for tea, I still drink tea in my house quite often. So it is

not necessary for tea enjoyment but a great bonus for sure. I will say that if you have the time, money and room to create a space for yourself that is purely for tea, you should do so. This will not only help to cultivate the spirit of Tea within you, but also help to focus your life by giving your other pursuits room to breathe. When the rest of your life

feels more in control, your tea life will thrive, and things will come more naturally. I hope next time we have tea together, we can share this life and create new experiences!



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