

FLAVOR & THE MENU

TOP 10 TRENDS FOR 2016

It's Time For Tea

This ancient beverage gets a new, modern image, from hipster to high-end to healthful

By Katie Ayoub

Diners today like to be a part of something. The craft beer craze. Coffee culture. The health and wellness movement. They're also looking for vital signs, proof that what they're consuming was once tended and nurtured rather than concocted and packaged. And they want to steer their own ship, mixing and matching to achieve a customized flavor experience. Tea meets the confluence of these drivers, swelling with opportunity as the breakout beverage of the year.

The United States is definitely late to the tea party—many parts of the world have appreciated both its ritual and its benefits for centuries. Steeped in the melting pot that makes this country's food and beverage scene special, the modern tea trend here is rich with opportunity and variety.

Iced teas now include flavors like Panera's Açai Berry Iced Tea. Matcha has made the jump from Asian menus onto mainstream ones.

As evidence, look to Chai in New York, which runs both a matcha latte and a matcha hot chocolate. Urban influence has seen both the hipster bubble (or boba) and kombucha teas move into restaurants and cafés, like the PandaStyle at Boba 7 "labobatory" in Los Angeles, made with honey green tea, honey boba and lychee boba. Sparkling teas have hitched onto the craft soda trend, delighting diners with refreshing fizz in their favorite tea blends, like True Food Kitchen's Autumn Spiced Sparkling Tea with cranberry, lime and cane sugar.

"Theatrical tea service can boost sales, and I look to Malaysia's pulled tea as an example. It's easy to train people in the technique, does not require special equipment and it creates that signature froth consumers love. Think tea-ccino!" - Robin Schempp



From Asian street food comes playful boba tea. Here, a base of Darjeeling black tea blends lusciously with creamy vanilla sauce, honey and cinnamon.

Tea is also sidling up to the bar, infusing into craft cocktails, adding depth, clarity and, depending on the tea, bitterness and smokiness. At Joule in Seattle, Lapsang souchong brings smoky depth to a blend of tequila, agave, Thai chile and lime in the Jalisco Campfire.

Tea's healthful cues have pushed it into the spotlight, inviting innovation while using the health and wellness attributes as an anchor for menu development. Looking to bring in Millennials and Gen Z? Mintel reports that three quarters of consumers aged 18 to 24 believe tea is better for you than coffee, forecasting longevity in tea's stay on today's menus.

"For thousands of years, tea has been revered for its medicinal properties, and as today's society seems hyper-aware of contemporary health trends, tea has become the perfect conduit for non-subtractive health: green tea for antioxidants, chamomile for calming effects, peppermint for digestion, and kombucha, for, well, everything else," says Maude Ballinger, account coordinator at The Culinary Edge.

And no matter what the tea drink, the foundation of this trend is the culture surrounding tea: the ritual, the origin, the narrative. Descriptions help brands deepen their story around community, artisanship and sustainability, with terms like "responsibly sourced," "stone-ground" and "whole-leaf." And the flavor descriptions offer rich and compelling menu language: crisp, soothing, buttery, floral, malty, toasty, tart, peppery, smoky, fragrant, vegetal.

"Tea is a beverage that is completely linked to its terroir," says Christopher Koetke of Kendall College School of Culinary Arts/Laureate International Universities. "Great teas, like great wines, come from specific places—individual estates and individual gardens. Like with wine, human hands coax the leaf into different styles of tea and select specific leaves on the tea plant for processing. Tea can follow the examples of wine, craft beer, coffee and now cider."

Iced Tea Made Premium



Tea sets apart this Cold-Brewed Smoked Walnut Soda, an intriguing infusion of smoked walnut shells, black tea and ginger.

Iced tea is a great platform for innovation as it's an American classic, familiar and well loved in its basic form. Premium touches like fruit purées, garnishes and handcrafted combinations mark the trend, elevating iced tea to signature status.

"Operators need to consider having at least two brewed iced teas, and to expand upon that with creative line extensions," says Kathy Casey of Kathy Casey Food Studios and Liquid Kitchen. "Creating a signature iced tea menu can be easy to execute and a great profit center. It will also help displace 'bottomless' iced tea with the opportunity for multiple drink sales."

At her Dish D'Lish concept at Sea-Tac airport in Seattle, one of the tea offerings is a Signature Northwest Berry Iced Tea, handcrafted with fresh-brewed black tea, Northwest berry mixture, then hand-shaken in front of the guest. Panda Express has its Tea Bar, touting handcrafted Asian-inspired drinks, which include three

“fruit-infused” teas (raspberry, passionfruit and peach). Wendy’s offers a Fruitea Chiller, touting a hand-shaken combination of freshly brewed organic green tea, real blueberry purée and real pineapple and pomegranate juices.

At Chicago’s The Lunatic, The Lover & The Poet, the restaurant has partnered with local emporium Rare Tea Cellar for its cocktail and non-alcoholic menus. “Teas are a great component for non-alcoholic drinks because of their versatility,” says Steve Carrow, chairman of the bar. “Herbal teas can mimic characteristics of gin and vodka, while woody or aged teas can easily replace whiskeys or Cognacs. In combination with the trending cold-pressed juice movement, the opportunities are endless.”

“The influx of Asian cuisine, the focus on health and wellness, and the rise of bitter as a likeable flavor have helped pave the way for tea. Plus, tea is positioning itself more as a flavor profile—which is a key differentiation from coffee.” - Rob Corliss

TEAS THAT SPARKLE

Artisan fizz adds a bit of pizzazz to cold tea drinks, whether alcoholic or not. Chicago’s Intelligentsia Coffee offers a rotating selection of cold-brewed sparkling teas, served on tap and pressurized on site. Starbucks offers a variety of flavored sparkling tea blends, like its Sparkling Black Tea and Tangerine Juice. At Garland in Raleigh, N.C., ginger ale carbonates the Dalai Palmer Mocktail, made with black tea, ginger, honey, Blenheim spicy ginger ale and lemon. Back at True Food Kitchen, the Medicine Man sees a blend of sea buckthorn, pomegranate, cranberry, honey, black tea and soda.

Some restaurants are offering the sparkle as a customizable option, much like flavored syrups, fruit purées and garnishes, or whether your drink is served hot or cold. PublicUs, a restaurant and coffeehouse in Las Vegas, serves a sparkling tea selection among its in-season tea offerings, but will sparkle any of its teas upon request. At G&B Coffee in Los Angeles, the Fizzy Hoppy Tea is touted as “daytime beer,” infusing Citra hops into Yunnan red tea. Full-flavored and refreshing, this sparkling tea with hops marks one of the most inventive and exciting avenues of this trend.

“Tea sodas could be a perfect no-sugar approach to satisfy the need for a fizzy drink. Tea sodas use tea’s natural flavors to deliver something that the average soda beverage doesn’t have.”

- Peter Csukor, KOR Food Innovation

Tipsy Tea

Pay attention to this hot trend of tea as a cocktail component, not to mention the growing variety of tea-infused spirits. Over the last five years, tea cocktails have grown 68 percent on menus, according to Mintel Menu Insights. At Asha Tea House in Berkeley, Calif., diners can order the Green Tea Mojito, made with Japanese green tea, raspberry purée, soju and muddled mint. It also has a simple cocktail called an Oolong Highball, which is a blend of unsweetened oolong tea with soju. Alder in New York serves the NY Streamline Baby with gin, rooibos, tangerine and tonic.

Adding tea to cocktails requires a bit of finesse. “Teas and tisanes offer depth, super trendy smoky impressions, fruity resonance (without the sugar or fruit juice), herbaceous notes and tannins—all important in balancing, lengthening and delivering flavor,” says chef-consultant Robin Schempp. “Hot or cold, infused syrup, infused spirit or strong steep—the addition of earthy black tea intermingles beautifully with whiskey.



Tapping into the theatrics of tea service, the Standard Punch at Yvonne's in Boston adds oolong tea to rye whiskey, raspberry, lemon, sage and soda.

Floral and herbal bring out the same notes in gin. Astringent green tea and matcha pair well with the sweeter profiles in rum or other sugar cane-based spirits.”

At Raleigh's Garland, the Broad Street Radler features rum, black tea, spicy ginger ale, ginger, lemon and honey. Crooked Stave Taproom in Denver blends a cranberry-lavender kombucha with saison beer, and Betony in New York offers a shandy with black tea kombucha. Back at Boba 7, customers can order boozy boba drinks, like the Green Tea Heineken, which combines green tea, Heineken and honey boba.

Bar manager Bill Anderson tweaks the classic Last Word cocktail at Vie Restaurant in Western Springs, Ill., by adding a housemade chamomile tea syrup. “This recipe brings out the herbal qualities of the gin, Chartreuse and the tea, while having enough brightness from the lime to balance everything into a refreshing harmony,” he says.

Get Crafty With Tea

by Kathy Casey

To create hand-crafted tea sodas:

- Add in sparkling water, purées, fresh herbs and high-quality, full-flavored syrups.
- To create a unique iced-tea service: Combine honey simple syrup, lemon/lime/orange wedges, fresh mint and a custom stir stick.
- For signature tea cocktails, look to unique iced tea flavors. With their zero-calorie profiles, teas can help cut mixer calories.
- Try making a matcha tea simple syrup for inclusion in a signature cocktail or non-alcoholic beverage.

Asian Persuasion

Apart from bubble tea, the two trendiest tea imports from the East are matcha and kombucha. Matcha is powdered green tea, powered by three times as much caffeine as regular green tea, but promising a Zen buzz rather than a frenetic one. It boasts tremendous health benefits, which is helping to propel matcha out of niche and into mainstream. New York's MatchaBar offers a number of matcha drinks, including the vanilla almond matcha latte and iced watermelon matcha. Starbucks serves a Green Tea Latte, made with lightly sweetened matcha and steamed milk.



Inspired by Indian cuisine, Joe's Spiked Chai Latte takes a housemade chai and froths it with cream. It's poured over Caffè Moka and aged rum at Joe's Seafood, Prime Steak & Stone Crab restaurants.

Entering through the functional food and beverage trend, kombucha is gaining momentum in this country. It's an effervescent black or green tea that's been fermented, boasting naturally occurring probiotics and anti-inflammatory properties. Roam Artisan Burgers in San Francisco even has kombucha on tap.

Brewing for a while now, tea is poised to skyrocket. "Choices and the ability to customize are key interests, and tea allows for this through its flexibility in flavor, caffeine range and effect," says The Culinary Edge's Ballinger. As proof that tea has moved from beverage to phenomenon, step into the expanding Montreal-based David's Tea, which offers tea in a modern whirlwind of flavors, bestowing the tea experience with a candy-store charm—perfect for younger demographics. Consumers can choose from blends like Birthday Cake, a cake-scented rooibos blend, or Blueberry Jam, a combination of black tea, blueberries, elderberries, cornflower and stevia.

Or look to coffeehouses that are taking tea more seriously, like Intelligentsia in Chicago, which now boasts 35 loose-leaf teas, and uniquely flavored cold-brewed teas are served on carbonated tap in a beer goblet to great effect. "These more sophisticated 'iced' teas are to

be sipped and savored, perfect for an afternoon break or as a meal pairing that is more evolved than simple iced tea with lemon," says Kara Nielsen, culinary director of Sterling-Rice Group.

Tea on American menus is clearly beginning to evolve, finally getting the proper attention it deserves.

As matcha continues to penetrate mainstream tea and beverage menus, expect to see the vibrant green tea powder show up on other parts of the menu as well, notably dessert. Everything from matcha green tea-dusted cheesecake and sugar cookies to matcha-mint chip ice cream and refreshing matcha milkshakes swirled with dark chocolate will complement tea-centric menus. - Gail Cunningham

Matcha Makes Moves

by Gerry Ludwig

While the matcha movement continues to spread, New York City remains the innovation leader. The city's growing number of matcha bars offers unique takes on hot and cold drinks and matcha-flavored foods, providing idea-rich inspiration for operators in locations where serving matcha remains a first-to-market opportunity.

One challenge in preparing matcha drinks is smoothly blending the powder with liquid so there are no granules. New York's matcha savant Kimie Kobayashi uses a foolproof technique at Matcha Cafe Wabi for

creating bases that are a reduced paste of matcha and heavy cream or nut milk. This not only ensures a consistent end-product but also speeds the drink-making process.

Matcha has also become a go-to flavoring for a wide variety of foods, including yogurt, muffins, doughnuts, biscotti, scones and Rice Krispies Treats. Chef Dominique Ansel of Cronut fame recently entered the fray with the introduction of his Matcha Beignets.