

Tea

Full steam ahead

COFFEE, STEP ASIDE. There's another hot commodity on the block.

With concoctions like Strawberry Tuxedo, London Fog and Tea-apolitan, you might think we're talking cocktails. But no...meet the rising star of café beverages: tea.

Next to water, tea is the world's most consumed drink. From ancient Japanese tea ceremonies to the traditional British High Tea, this exotic elixir is steeped in tradition. Today, scores of North American coffee houses have added tea to their menus, tea rooms are appearing on many trendy street corners and tea is an ingredient in everything from ice-cream to chocolate.

In the last five years in Vancouver alone more than 10 tea houses have set up shop including Steeps on West Broadway (serving over 200 teas), Capstone Tea & Fondue on Denman,

O-Cha Tea Bar in Yaletown, Main Tea House on Main Street (serving bubble tea), and Herbal Republic on Granville Street.

Why the buzz?

Tea is not only flavourful, it's good for you. Without milk or sugar, tea has no calories

and even the strongest cup of tea has about 40mg less caffeine than a cup of coffee. According to several recent studies, tea helps fight cancer and heart disease, regulates cholesterol, suppresses appetite and boosts the immune system. Packed with antioxidants and even fluoride, tea protects against harmful bacteria, viruses, tooth decay and gum disease. And tea can contribute to your body's daily fluid requirement. That's a lot of punch in a pinch of tea leaves.

Muzi Tea Bar on West Cordova, which opened in 2002 and specializes in the uber-healthy matcha green tea, is a model contemporary tea room. Enter its glass doors, seat yourself on a dark wooden chair and order one of over 30 loose leaf teas. Founding partner Brian Takeda says Vancouver's culture and sophistication made it the ideal place for a tea-only café. To his surprise, baby boomers are Muzi's star customers. "The baby boomer demographic probably represents over one-third of all of our sales now."

Walter Sawadsky, Marketing Manager for Vancouver-based chain Blenz Coffee echoes Takeda's findings: "Baby boomers are very health conscious and account for a large part of our tea customers." Blenz Coffee's new stores not only have dedicated "tea counters" but just two years ago, the company trademarked Matcha Latte™ and MatchaChillo™ (hot and cold versions of matcha green tea).

As more people tune into its healthy, flavourful properties, tea just might steam ahead of coffee as the café beverage of choice. —Belinda Bruce **ZZ**



What's your cup of tea?

There are hundreds of teas and tisanes (herbal infusions). Black, green and oolong teas are the basis for many flavoured teas. Loose leaf teas provide the most health benefits.

Black: Leaves are fully oxidized. Hearty flavour in a rich amber brew. Contains high concentration of antioxidants. Served hot or cold.

Green: Not oxidized. Delicate taste, light green colour, refreshing quality. Loaded with antioxidants.

Oolong: Semi-fermented. Consumed without milk or sugar. Flavourful and highly aromatic. Contains age-defying antioxidants.

Matcha: Oldest variety of Japanese green tea, ground into a fine powder. Because matcha is mixed with water and consumed entirely, it provides 10 to 15 times the nutrients found in regular green teas. No caffeine: natural amino acids provide a boost that lasts 3 to 6 hours.

Roobos: Mild and aromatic herbal tea from South Africa. Slight nutty flavour. Contains 50% more antioxidants than are found in green tea.

Bubble tea: Originated in Asia, dessert-like. The "bubbles": chewy, marble-sized black balls of tapioca. In addition to green and black teas, it's available in peach, lichee, mango and passion fruit. Served hot or cold.

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