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# ‘A CUP OF TEA’

by Sharon Black

**IT IS A WELL-KNOWN FACT THAT THE FRENCH ARE A NATION OF COFFEE DRINKERS, WHILE THE BRITISH PREFER A MORE GENTEEL CUP OF TEA. OR IS IT? IN FACT, ENGLAND'S TRADITIONAL BREW IS CURRENTLY ENJOYING A SURGE IN POPULARITY AMONG FRENCH URBANITES.**

**O**ne in four French people now start the day with a Darjeeling or an Earl Grey, compared to just one in seven in 1998. *Salons de thé* are a fashionable fixture in most towns and city squares, and a new, glossy magazine dedicated to the subject - called simply *Thé* - was launched recently in Paris. Then there is the third *Salon International du Thé* exhibition due to be held in the capital later this year, to help educate the masses on some of the finer qualities of the humble cuppa. So why the sudden popularity?

Health and the French enthusiasm for culinary experimentation seem to be the two main reasons. *Thé* was founded not by a media executive, keen to exploit an empty niche in the market for profit, but by a doctor. Dr Marvin Edeas, a Maltese nutritionist, spent four years researching the health properties of tea. What he discovered impressed him so much that he wanted to spread the word. The seventh edition of his quarterly magazine hits the shelves next month (October).

“Tea contains a high proportion of antioxidants, which help to prevent cardiovascular diseases, cancer and other chronic illnesses including flu,” explains Dr Edeas. “Indeed, one cup of

tea equals 3.5 glasses of orange juice in terms of the antioxidant effect. I myself drink around 10 cups of tea a day.” One recent study suggests that drinking five cups of tea a day can cut your chance of a stroke by as much as 70 per cent. Tea also contains fluoride for strong teeth and no calories (unless you add milk and sugar, of course).

As for the healthiest cuppa, first prize must go to green tea (such as Sencha, a Japanese brew). Not having been oxidized, it is even richer in antioxidants. Green tea also contains significant levels of vitamin C, as well as vitamins B1 and B2 and vitamin E.

The famous Gallic preoccupation with food and drink is thought to be another important factor in the nation’s new-found enthusiasm for tea. *‘La terrine de pamplemousse, sauce au thé’* (grapefruit terrine with tea sauce), made with Earl Grey, is a favourite recipe of Philippe Chapon, pâtisserie chef at Guy Savoy restaurant in Paris. *‘Tarte Darjeeling Margaret’s Hope’* (Margaret’s Hope Darjeeling Tart) is an invention of Mariage Frères, the oldest French tea importer and promoter of the ‘art’ of French tea. Other popular recipes include alcoholic tea cocktails, tea ice cream, cheese cake and Earl Grey jam.





When it comes to the more conventional drinking varieties though, the French favour the classics: Ceylon, Darjeeling, Earl Grey and Assam. Green teas are also a big seller, as are fruit flavoured varieties and herbal teas (*'tisanes'* or *'infusions'*).

The result of all this interest is the sudden springing up over the last decade of *salons de thé*. Few French towns do not have at least one *salon*, usually sited on a central *place* or fashionable side street and boasting a menu offering dozens of varieties.

In many *salons*, such as Mogador on the *Place du Marché* in Nîmes, the chosen brew is served in an elegant, often remarkably ornate teapot (*théière*) with matching cup and saucer, in a display at least as exacting as in any formal English tea house.

But it is what accompanies the pot of brew that distinguishes the French tea ritual from its British counterpart. No scones, shortbread or Bakewell tart here. Instead the French *pâtisserie* takes pride of place on the side-plate. Its fine, delicate nature is what puts French tea into a class of its own.

There are other cross-Channel differences in our tastes for tea. Strength is one: the average sachet of black tea in France contains just 2g of leaves, compared to 3.125g in Britain (our teabags also top the Dutch and German in strength). Interestingly, tea in France seems to be more of a woman's drink than a man's. Ninety-five per cent of subscribers to *'Thé'* magazine are women, as were 75 per cent of attendees at last year's *Salon International du Thé*.

Contrary to popular belief, however, the French love affair with tea is nothing new. The French first began brewing the black leaf back in 1636 when the first clippers from India entered Europe. It wasn't until 15-20 years later that tea finally arrived on British shores.

Indeed, the supposedly British tradition of afternoon tea was actually coined in France in the 1740s after *Madame de Sévigné* wrote one of her famed letters to a friend about a five o'clock tea she had just attended. Afternoon tea wasn't introduced to England until nearly a century later.

Similarly, the habit of adding milk to tea was invented by another Frenchwoman, the *Marquise de la Sablière* (this 'French touch' was quickly adopted by the English). In France, tea remained in high vogue until the late 17th century, when cocoa leaves started being imported from South America and the Caribbean.

## RÉSUMÉ

### “Une Tasse de Thé”

par Sharon Black

Le café est la boisson des français et le thé celle des anglais ; pourtant le thé est de plus en plus populaire chez les citadins français. En 4 ans, la proportion de français qui se réveillent avec une tasse de thé est passée de un septième à un quart. La mode des salons de thé, le récent lancement du magazine «Thé» et l'organisation du 3<sup>ème</sup> Salon International du Thé sont révélateurs de cette popularité. Celle-ci peut notamment s'expliquer de deux façons : l'attention que portent les Français à leur santé et leur goût pour l'expérimentation culinaire.

Le magazine « Thé » n'a pas été créé par un homme d'affaires, mais par un médecin maltais qui a voulu faire connaître les extraordinaires bienfaits du thé : protection contre les maladies cardiovasculaires, le cancer et d'autres maladies grâce aux antioxydants, et protection dentaire grâce à son fluor. N'ayant pas fermenté, le thé vert est le meilleur pour la santé : beaucoup d'antioxydants, vitamines C, B, B1, E.

Les Français aiment manger et boire. De plus en plus populaire, le thé entre dans des recettes comme celle du Chef du Savoy, Philippe Chapon (la terrine de pamplemousse, sauce au thé), celle de Mariaque Frères, importateurs de thé (tarte Darjeeling Margaret's Hope), des recettes de cocktails alcoolisés, glaces et confitures. Mais lorsqu'ils boivent le thé, les Français préfèrent les classiques (Ceylan, Darjeeling, Earl Grey et Assam), ainsi que les thés verts, les thés aromatisés et les tisanes.

Sur les places et rues branchées de la plupart des villes françaises, on voit donc apparaître des salons de thé élégants, comme le Mogador à Nîmes, qui n'ont rien à envier aux salons traditionnels anglais. Mais le rituel du thé est différent en France. Ici, ni scones ni biscuits, mais une pâtisserie raffinée accompagne votre tasse de thé ; ensuite, le thé se boit plus léger ; enfin, le thé est principalement une boisson de femmes, tout comme les abonnés au magazine « Thé » et le public du dernier Salon International du Thé sont majoritairement féminins.

Contrairement aux idées reçues, l'amour des français pour le thé ne date pas d'hier. Ce sont eux qui ont commencé à préparer le thé en 1636 (15 ou 20 ans avant les Anglais), qui ont inventé le « Five o'clock tea » (presque un siècle avant qu'il ne devienne une tradition britannique) et qui ont eu l'idée d'y ajouter du lait. Le thé est resté très en vogue jusqu'à l'arrivée des premières feuilles de cacao, à la fin du 17<sup>ème</sup> siècle.

Pour célébrer ce réveil historique, le 3<sup>ème</sup> Salon International du Thé réunira médecins, diététiciens, fabricants de thé et profanes, à Paris, au Palais des Congrès, du 6 au 8 décembre 2002. On s'attend à une affluence record.

Mais même après la clôture du Salon, Paris restera « théophile » grâce à son nombre record de salons de thé, son Club des Buveurs de Thé ( plus de 100 adhérents) qui organise notamment des dégustations, des conférences, des visites, et ses écoles, telles que l'université du Thé qui propose ses cours du soir à ceux qui veulent tout savoir sur le thé.

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### AU SUJET DU THÉ...

Le Thé a presque 5000 ans. Il fut découvert, comme le veut la légende, par un empereur chinois en 2737 avant Jésus Christ, lorsque quelques feuilles de thé se posèrent dans une marmite d'eau bouillante.

On distingue trois principaux types de thé : le thé noir, le thé vert et le thé oolong. Plus de 90% du thé consommé en occident est du thé noir qui a été complètement oxydé ou fermenté et qui produit une boisson au goût corsé et à la couleur ambrée. Parmi les thé noirs les plus populaires, on trouve l'« *English Breakfast* » ( bon choix pour le petit déjeuner, son goût robuste se mariant bien avec le lait), le Darjeeling (mélange de thé himalayens au parfum fleuri, parfait pour le déjeuner), et l'Orange Pekoe (le mélange de thé de Ceylan le plus couramment consommé).

Le thé vert échappe au processus de fermentation. Son goût est plus délicat et sa couleur vert clair/dorée.

Le thé oolong, populaire en Chine, est semi fermenté ; sa couleur et son goût se situent entre ceux du thé vert et ceux du thé noir.

Alors que les thé parfumés sont des variations de ces trois principaux types de thé, les tisanes ne contiennent pas de véritables feuilles de thé. Les tisanes et infusions médicinales sont préparées à base de fleurs, baies, écorces, graines, feuilles et racines de nombreuses plantes.

To cater for this historical turnaround, the **third Salon International du Thé** will take place in *le Palais des Congrès, Porte Maillot, Paris, 6-8 Décembre 2002*. The conference will bring together doctors, nutritionists, tea manufacturers and lay people to explore and celebrate the humble cuppa. Last year 55,000 people attended the four-day event and this year the organisers are expecting an even bigger turn-out.

But once the last piece of lipstick-stained chinaware has been cleared away, the opportunity to indulge the palate for tea in the capital will not be over. To cater for the increasing number of Parisian *théophiles* (there is even a word in French for 'people who love tea'), the capital is home to a tea drinkers' club, several tea schools and no less than 150 tearooms - more than any other European capital including London.

Members of the *Club des Buveurs de Thé* (Tea Drinkers Club) - over 100 at the last count - organize tea tastings, lectures, literary contests, exhibitions and tours. Meanwhile, at the *Université du Thé* (University of Tea) you can sign up for evening classes covering tea ceremonies, cooking with tea, tea production, the importance of water in tea preparation, and more.

Whew - it's enough to make you want to sit down and relax with a nice cup of tea!

Thanks to 'The Tea Council', Gowan Avenue, London, for the use of their photographs.



### ABOUT TEA...

Tea is nearly 5,000 years old and was discovered, as legend has it, in 2737 BC by a Chinese emperor when some tea leaves accidentally blew into a pot of boiling water.

Tea breaks down into three basic types: black, green and oolong. In the west, over 90 per cent of tea consumed is **black tea**, which has been fully oxidized or fermented and yields a full-flavoured, amber brew. Some of the popular black teas include English Breakfast (good breakfast choice since its hearty flavour mixes well with milk), Darjeeling (a blend of Himalayan teas with a flowery bouquet suited for lunch) and Orange Pekoe (a blend of Ceylon teas that is the most widely used of the tea blends).

**Green tea** skips the oxidizing step. It has a more delicate taste and is light green/golden in colour.

**Oolong tea**, popular in China, is partly oxidized and is a cross between black and green tea in colour and taste. While flavoured teas evolve from these three basic teas, **herbal teas** contain no true tea leaves. Herbal and 'medicinal' teas are created from the flowers, berries, peels, seeds, leaves and roots of many different plants.