



How Do You Take Your Tea?

BY JENNIFER HAZARD

Around 3:00 p.m., when I begin to feel a lull in my workday, there is nothing I like better than a cup of tea and a cookie or two. Sipping tea at my desk provides the down time I need to make it through the day.

In 18th century England, Anna Russell, the 7th Duchess of Bedford, felt the same lull between lunch—a light meal at the time—and dinner, which started as late as 8:30 p.m. To avoid this feeling, Russell began enjoying a tray of tea, bread, butter, and cake. Soon she began sharing afternoon tea with friends.

The tea tradition continues today in teahouses, inns, restaurants, and spas throughout Maine. According to Dorothea Johnson, Falmouth resident and author of the book *Tea & Etiquette*, tea is more popular than ever. Johnson, who also founded the Protocol School of Washington, is an expert on afternoon tea. She says Jacqueline's Tea Room in Freeport is one of her favorites.

Opposite Page: Jacqueline Soley serves afternoon tea to Dorothea Johnson at Jacqueline's Tea Room in Freeport.
Right and below: 3-tiered tray served at Jacqueline's.

Owner Jacqueline Soley's tearoom is everything a person would imagine a traditional English-style teahouse to be. The décor exudes femininity—lace curtains frame the windows, small chandeliers hang above white-clothed tables set with delicate china. And while these details suggest formality, there's something equally homey about the place. Maybe it's the enticing aroma of scones wafting from the kitchen, or the general store-like display of tea in silver canisters behind the register.

Visitors have their choice of rooms and tables. I sit in a cozy corner on a wrought iron rocking chair. The menu is so large I decide to concentrate on the white teas first, based on Soley's recommendation. I opt for the Summer Fling, which is infused with honeydew melon. The tea is smooth and not at all sweet; it immediately becomes a favorite.

In addition to tea, Soley serves a traditional 3-tiered tray of scones, tea sandwiches, cookies, and cakes. The tray is accompanied by lemon curd, seedless blackberry jam, and rich Devon cream.

I tell Soley this is my second experience having high tea, and she politely corrects me: this is afternoon tea. High tea is a hearty, family style meal. According to Dorothea Johnson's book, *Tea & Etiquette*, high tea or "meat tea" was the main meal of the day during the Industrial Revolution, when hungry laborers returned home from a long day's work.

Afternoon tea, or the "Queen's Tea" as Soley calls it, is served between lunch and dinner, typically between 3:00 and 5:00 p.m. To accommodate modern American culture, she breaks from tradition, offering tea at 11 a.m. and 1 p.m.

In the course of an hour, I try at least four pots of tea. Soley recommends certain teas with specific foods. The white tea pairs well with scones. And a smooth green tea is a nice accompaniment to cucumber and smoked salmon sandwiches. Darker teas, such as a Chai tea spiced with cinnamon, cardamom, ginger and vanilla, pair well with desserts, like lemon lavender shortbread and streusel cake.



Further up the coast in Boothbay, the owners of MacNab's Tea Room—Nancy Hilton and Fran Browne—share a wealth of knowledge about all things tea-related. Housed in a 200-year old cape, the little tearoom and shop is situated on a private road called Lu Yu Tea Lane, named after a Chinese sage who wrote the first definitive work on tea.

MacNab's offers teas from all over the world, and the teas on their menu are divided into four categories: white, green, oolong, and black. While each tea has its own distinct flavor and color, the leaves all come from the same plant, a warm-weather evergreen

called *Camellia sinensis*.

Much of Hilton and Browne's knowledge comes from years of trial and error. When the tearoom opened in 1991, both women were avid tea drinkers, but their real education came from attending tea-related trade shows, lectures, and a tea tour of China.



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The ladies pride themselves in offering what they feel are some of the best teas in the world. MacNab's has 75 varieties of teas and award-winning custom blends for purchase in their shop and online. The back room of the tiny cottage is filled with incoming and outgoing shipping boxes, various tea-making supplies, and canisters of loose-leaf tea. According to Hilton, the shop's mail order business is top priority. "Our focus is on the beverage more than anything else."

That being said, MacNab's offers a unique menu. Hilton uses edible flowers such as nasturtium and pansies from the garden for afternoon tea sandwiches. A daylily stuffed with deviled ham and red pepper hummus is also popular. For High Tea, a full-course meal, Hilton's recipes are often infused with tea, such as a tea-poached chicken. Her motto: "Don't play with your food. Let me do it for you."

For all of the hustle and bustle behind the scenes, I found the tearoom to be quaint and casual. It's a tiny space with just a few wooden tables and chairs, surrounded by shelves of antique teapots and other curiosities. Browne's Scottish terrier, Norwood—named after renowned tea expert James Norwood Pratt—prances from room to room. The relaxed atmosphere is important to the owners. Hilton says, "Many people think of afternoon tea as Victorian and English with a lot of frou frou and lace. We didn't want that for our teahouse. We want our guests to be comfortable."

Like MacNab's, the Kismet Inn in Bath offers a memorable tea experience. Here you'll find afternoon tea with a Middle Eastern spin. Chef/owner Shadi Towfighi opened the inn in 2006, hoping to offer guests a sanctuary from their busy, everyday lives. Her calm demeanor contributes to the inn's relaxed feel. "I cook slowly, I eat slowly, I talk slowly. It's just the way I am," she says.

Towfighi, who grew up in Iran, treats visitors to tea in the Iranian tradition. Tea is prepared using brewing methods similar to an old-fashioned Samovar—a coal-heated metal container that holds and slowly brews a teapot filled with tea concentrate.

The inn, housed in a traditional, 19th century Victorian, is refreshingly eclectic.



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Towfighi handpicked all of the furnishings—a blend of traditional and new—at antique markets in Maine and Manhattan, where she resides during the winter months. She serves tea in clear glasses, similar to the style she used as a child in Iran. Along with the tea, Towfighi serves a plate of homemade confections, including petite almond cookies, butter cookies with raisins and sugar, and a cookie called Kamar Bareek, flavored with a chickpea nut flour native to Iran.

Towfighi credits her childhood in Iran for her tea knowledge, where she says tea is a part of life. Her custom blends combine a mixture of black teas including Earl Grey, Gunpowder, and Assam along with spices such as cardamom, cinnamon, and nutmeg. She stores her blends in airtight containers where the tea remains for six months to a year before first use. She says the aging process allows the tea's natural flavor to intensify.

It's easy to feel instantly at home at the Kismet Inn, and for those who wish to stay beyond afternoon tea, there are five guest rooms—several with deep, soaking tubs for an Iranian spa



photograph courtesy of Kismet Inn



photographs courtesy of Kismet Inn



treatment Towfighi performs called Kisch Keshee. Guests can enjoy a full body exfoliation, and afterwards, sit down for a three-course, organic meal. And if all that pampering doesn't leave you melting in your chair, Towfighi sends you off to bed with a calming cup of Hibiscus tea sweetened with honey.

If a blend of tea and spa treatments intrigues you, Soakology in Portland's Monument Square is another unique spot for



photographs by Cynthia Farr-Weinfeld © 2009

indulgence. Guests can choose from a wide range of fair trade and organic teas in the ground-floor tearoom and then relax downstairs with a calming foot soak infused with tea.

Owner Roberta Alexander originally worked in New York City and had the idea for Soakology after 9/11. Like many New Yorkers, she left the city in search of a different way of life. While visiting her daughter in Portland, Oregon she discovered a holistic spa, the source of her inspiration. She returned to the east coast, and after several stops and starts, she opened Soakology Foot Sanctuary and Teahouse in 2004.

Tea is used in just about everything here—from the cookies and salad dressings offered in the tiny café, to the treatments used in the foot soaks. According to manager Sarah Lee Franklin, most guests



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opt for a soak and a pot of tea. The menu offers traditional white, green, oolong, and black teas, but visitors will also find herbal teas with a wide range of health benefits. Franklin says popular guest favorites are Yerba Maté, known for its cleansing and stimulating properties, and Rooibos, a calming red tea which boosts the immune system.

For my soak, I happily nestle in raised cushioned seats with cozy throw pillows—pants rolled up, feet in position for the tub. A therapist offers a warm neck and shoulder pillow, so I can relax while waiting for my pot of tea and soak of choice. Soaks, which are wheeled up to guests in carts carrying large, clay bowls, offer a variety of therapeutic properties, ranging from a relaxing lavender-milk soak to an invigorating peppermint soak to reduce swelling.



Janise Monaghan, Jennifer Harnish, Terri Fasulo at Soakology

And if that's not enough relaxation for you, there are also à la carte options, including exfoliation, mud baths, reflexology, and massage. Sharing the same goal as Towfighi, Alexander says she opened Soakology so people could find relief from daily stresses.

Just across town, tea lovers will find another holistic hot spot, a tiny little teahouse/apothecary called Homegrown Herb & Tea. Sarah Richards, owner and resident herbalist, stands behind a bar and personally creates specialty blends for each customer. The place is like the Cheers of tea—guests sit at the bar and chat as if they've known each other for years.

At Homegrown, Richards specializes in teas that address common ailments, including arthritis, flu, and colds. When I ask for a tea to help an overworked, overtired mom, Franklin suggests "The Teacher's Pet." While we chat, she pulls glass jars off the shelves, and begins to prepare my tea on a large, wooden cutting board. She tells me the tea is a blend of healing herbs, including Kava Kava, St. John's Wort, Saw Palmetto berries, lemon verbena,

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Sarah Richards, owner of Home Grown Herb & Tea, custom blends tea from her Culinary Corner.

Ashvagandha, and a fresh slice of apple. The combination, she says, calms the nerves, replenishes the spirit, and restores passion.

A quick study and avid cook, Richards experimented with a variety of herbs to cure her own ailments, using sources like the *Encyclopedia of Medicinal Herbs* and *Mastering Herbalism* as guides. Each mentions that herbal teas should appeal to all the senses, and Richards abides by this in every cup she creates.

Richards is also interested in Ayurveda—a 5,000+ year-old medicinal philosophy that incorporates the body's 5 elements: fire, air, water, earth, and space. According to Richards, all of these elements make up a person's dosha, or body constitution. There are three main doshas: Vata, Kapha, and Pitta. If asked, Richards will determine a guest's dosha, and provide a tea in which to balance it. She's quick to mention she's no guru—"I just read a lot of books and practice."

Whether you believe in Ayurveda or not, Richards' enthusiasm is infectious,

and her customers are certainly fans. "People just come in and open up," she says and laughs. "Sometimes I think about getting a sign like Lucy from Peanuts that reads, 'Psychiatrist 5 cents.'"

Admittedly, I leave Homegrown feeling better than when I came in, but truth be told, taking time out to stop, reflect, and enjoy tea is relaxing in itself, no matter where, or how, you drink it.



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Some Tea Facts

- According to the Tea Association U.S.A., based in New York City, one cup of black tea contains 40 milligrams of caffeine while coffee contains 50 milligrams.
- De-caffeinated teas aren't. They retain small amounts of caffeine. Only rooibos, herbal teas, and tisanes are truly caffeine-free.
- Teas come from the same leaf but are processed differently. White tea is made from the early shoots or buds of the plant, is the least processed of any tea, and has the lowest amount of caffeine. Green tea is not oxidized and is high in antioxidants. Oolong tea is only partially oxidized, and black tea is oxidized for the longest period of time, is the highest in caffeine, and includes Darjeeling, English Breakfast, Earl Grey, Lapsang Souchong, and Red Mudan.
- Brewing the "perfect" cup of tea depends on personal taste, but it is generally recommended that white tea be brewed for 3-5 minutes, green tea for 1-2 minutes, Oolong for 2-4 minutes, black tea for 3-5 minutes, and herbal tea for at least 5 minutes.
- "Tea" made with herbs, flowers, or fruit is not really tea, but an infusion or tisane.

Jacqueline's Tea Room, 201 Main Street, Freeport 207.865.2123 www.jacquelinestearoom.com
MacNab's Tea Room, 5 Lu Yu Tea Lane, Boothbay 207.633.7222 www.macnabstearoom.com
Kismet Inn, 44 Summer Street, Bath 207.443.3399 www.kismetinnmaine.com
Soakology, 30 City Center, Portland 207.789.7625 www.soakology.com
Homegrown Herb & Tea, 195 Congress Street, Portland 207.774.3484



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Tea Etiquette

According to Dorothea Johnson, author of *Tea & Etiquette* and acknowledged grande dame of the art of tea, there are certain protocols that should be observed when drinking tea:

Support the saucer with your fingers under the saucer and your thumb hooked over the edge.

Grasp the tea cup with three fingers: your third finger under the handle, your index finger inserted in the loop of the handle, and your thumb resting on top of the handle.

No extended pinkies!

It's acceptable to toast your companion by raising your tea cup and gesturing toward another's cup, but no clinking!

Don't swirl the tea around in the cup as if it were wine in a glass.

Stir your tea with a spoon quietly without clinking it against the cup.

Don't leave your spoon in the tea cup. Place it on the saucer behind the cup.

Pour your cup three-fourths full, never to the brim.

Look into the cup, not over, when drinking tea.

When drinking tea, don't tip the cup too much; just keep it at a slight angle.

The latest edition of Dorothea Johnson's book, *Tea & Etiquette: Taking Tea for Business and Pleasure* will be available in May. More information available at www.elmwoodinn.com/books/teaetiquette.html

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Tea Poached Chicken

MacNab's Tea Room, Boothbay

2 chicken breasts
6-8 teaspoons of MacNab's Colonial Blend, or your favorite smoky, black tea such as Lapsang Souchong

Prepare tea infusion by adding 6-8 teaspoons to 6 cups of boiling water. Let it steep for 15 minutes and remove the tea.

Gently poach the chicken in the tea infusion until tender. Cut into strips and serve either in a salad or in an open faced sandwich. We use scones or English muffins for our sandwiches and add a little mayonnaise and lemon pepper to season.

You can also purchase prepared roasted chicken strips and marinate for several hours in the tea.

Citrus Tea Salmon

Merrill Williams, MF&L Publisher

4 8-ounce salmon fillets
1 Tablespoon + 1 teaspoon Irish breakfast tea
1½ Tablespoons dark brown sugar
1½ teaspoons dried orange peel
¼ teaspoon ginger powder
½ teaspoon kosher salt
¼ teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
4 teaspoons lemon juice

Preheat oven to 350°.

Using a mortar and pestle, coarsely crush the tea. In a small bowl, mix together the crushed tea, sugar, orange peel, ginger, salt, and pepper.

Place salmon fillets in a baking pan and brush each fillet with 1 teaspoon of lemon juice. Sprinkle the citrus-tea rub on each and spread evenly to coat each fillet.

Bake in the oven for 20 minutes.

Serves 4.

Annie's Tea-Infused Butter Cookies

Anne Mahle, author of *At Home, At Sea*

2 cups sugar
2 Tablespoons loose Earl Grey, Jasmine, or Darjeeling tea

First, make tea-infused sugar by wrapping the tea in cheesecloth or a bag made for loose tea. Place in a glass jar and add the sugar. Top with a lid and shake. Wait two weeks before making your cookies.

1 cup (2 sticks) unsalted butter, softened
¾ cup tea-infused sugar
2 egg yolks
1 teaspoon vanilla
2¼ cups unbleached flour
¼ teaspoon salt

When you're ready to make the cookies, preheat oven to 350°.

In a large bowl, cream together the butter and sugar. Add the egg yolks and vanilla and mix until light and fluffy. Sift the flour and salt over the butter mixture and mix until well combined. Chill for 10 minutes.

Dust the counter and rolling pin with flour and roll the dough out to ¼ inch. Using a 2-inch biscuit cutter, cut the dough into even circles. Place onto an ungreased cookie sheet and bake for 10 minutes without browning. Remove from cookie sheet and cool on a cooling rack or waxed paper. Store in an airtight container and savor with hot tea.

Makes 3 dozen.