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Saturday, 08 August 2015

Oh, Tea! (OT)

*~ written by **Ctein, TOP Technical Editor***
(who is posting on-and-off while Mike's nomadic)

Folks, it's been a long time since I've regaled you with tales of tea. Partly, it's because I haven't written lately. Partly it's because Mike felt I'd hit that topic enough for a while. Oh, those perfidious coffee-drinkers.** But, here I am in the driver's seat of this jalopy, so...

The first tidbit is a fine little hack I came up with last year. You will all remember (of course) how much I love my Paio Infusion Tea Pot.

(photograph courtesy of Amazon)

It gets used every single day (well, any day that I'm not making macha, which is most of them). After a couple of years of use, the very fine screen on the bottom was getting pretty badly clogged up. The pot was draining slowly. With some very fine greens, it was hardly draining at all.

Scrubbing it with a toothbrush didn't work; the screen was way too fine and I couldn't get to the underside of it. I tried soaking it repeatedly in hot baking soda solution, which dissolved all the tannin but didn't clear out most of the holes in the screen.

I thought on it. Okay, dissolving the tannin isn't working. There's clearly bits of tea leaves clogging up the holes. What would dissolve organic-matter clogs?

Put it that way and the answer is obvious. Drain cleaner! At least, so long as it doesn't dissolve the infuser. I knew it wouldn't attack the screen or the stop valve ball, which are stainless steel. (You don't want to try this on aluminum––it will dissolve!) I didn't know about the adhesives or plastics.

Nothing ventured, nothing gained. I poured a few ounces of liquid plumber stuff into the infuser, pressed the ball valve button to allow some of it flow through the screen, and let it sit for 10 min.

Success! My infuser came out looking practically like new.

Kids, if you do try this at home (with or without adult supervision) I make no promises about what will happen to your particular tea strainer or infuser. You're on your own. Do remember to rinse it out *very* thoroughly when you're done. Lye tastes yucky.

~~~

When Jon Singer and I visited my friend Bill Waddington, the owner of TeaSource in the Twin Cities, in June he introduced us to two extremely unusual teas. I've never had anything like them before, and they're both wonderful.

The first is a white tea called Silver Bud or Ya Bao. This is a winter pick––the leaves haven't even started to come out of the buds and the pick is of the entire bud.

(photo courtesy of TeaSource)

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You brew it with boiling water. No kidding. Half-fill the pot with buds; they are very fluffy. Try a two- or three-minute brew time for the first infusion. The brew is very very pale, nearly water-clear. It has a lovely floral aroma and extremely light and delicate flavor. It's almost all in the nose.

You can get up to four infusions if you increase the brew time by about 50% on each successive pot. It doesn't get bitter, it just takes longer and longer to pull enough flavor and aroma out of the buds into the liquor.

It's surprisingly inexpensive––$10 for 4 ounces, and that will fill up a quart-size jar with buds.

The website says that it "Can also be aged, as a puer." How strange! I've queried Bill about that; I'll let you know what he says.

The other tea he served us is a new puer that he'll be stocking in September. What makes Long Run Puer unusual is its brew time–– 15 seconds with boiling water. Yes, really, one-quarter minute is enough! It produces a lovely brew. Not smoky nor heavy, but still very full-flavored. I suspect it will tolerate a lot of infusions. Bill thinks it will also age exceptionally well, although we won't know for years to come.

Enjoy your weekend and have a nice cuppa on me.

(** And now that treacherous swiller of java tries to bury this column with posts of his own. An unsavory lot, those bean-sippers.)

Ctein, TOP Technical Editor
(who is posting on-and-off while Mike's nomadic)

(To see all the comments, click on the "Comments" link below.)

Featured Comments from:

Posted on Saturday, 08 August 2015 at 01:57 AM in Ctein, Off-topic posts | Permalink

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Comments

Hello Ctein, regarding bringing out special flavors in teas: recently I tried cold-brewing my green teas. Inspired by Cory Doctorow's experiments with coffee (in his opinion and after a very long time experimenting with most methods, nothing comes close) I put some leaves of Darjeeling in one liter water and let it sit in the fridge for 10 hours. Then I filtered and tried... never tasted a tea so good. All friends who blind-tested the brew were asking me what it was. It was flowery. And I mean flowery. Very sweet, smelling and tasting like blooming flowers. For most it was barely recognizable as green tea. I never knew such an aroma would be in it. Afterwards I tried again with other green teas, same result for most them. I would recommend it.

Posted by: Tobias | Saturday, 08 August 2015 at 03:03 AM

Dear Ctein,

Enjoying your tea posts. When the chance arises, drive up to the East Bay, over to 4th Street in Berkeley, and try some teas at Teance Tea Shop. http://www.teance.com. Ask for Winnie, or Darius, owners and managers. I think you'll be delighted.

Posted by: Rev. Heng Sure | Saturday, 08 August 2015 at 04:39 AM

You've got my attention. Now where is my cuppa?

[***Ctein*** *replies: Dar, it's sitting here waiting for you. If you don't hurry the Pouchong is gonna be cold...*]

Posted by: Darlene Almeda | Saturday, 08 August 2015 at 05:37 AM

Instead of drain cleaner try denture cleaning tablets. I used to use these years ago (Steradent, I think they were called) for cleaning teapots and they were very effective. When you think about it they could almost have been designed for the purpose!

Posted by: Richard Parkin | Saturday, 08 August 2015 at 05:39 AM

As a prophylactic to anti-tea rants sure to follow, let me say I bought the Paio infuser based on your recommendation and I love it. Now I have some cleaning tips to go with it. Great stuff. By the way, it is mostly gunpowder green that goes into my infuser. When we buy macha, we tend to make ice cream with it! My wife is a China scholar and is amused at my episodic interest in teas . . . but she bought me some puer and it was quite something. Just to confound things further, my daily caffeine fix is coffee. But life would be dull indeed if we never ventured beyond what we know.

P.S. we do have some Lye around the house. I use it when mixing film developers, of all things, rather than on the pipes. How funny that these interests should circle up together photography->developers->lye->clean tea infusers = happy photographer. Best, Ben Marks

Posted by: Benjamin Marks | Saturday, 08 August 2015 at 07:35 AM

Imagine my disappointment when you didn't say that you tried cleaning your tea pot with indicator stop bath.

Posted by: Roger | Saturday, 08 August 2015 at 09:02 AM

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Speaking of tea, I've been advised to wean myself from caffeine. Fine. So I've been exploring tea--a hot drink in the morning and a cool drink midday. I avoid sugar, but like half & half in the morning and lemon in the afternoon. My palette is not sophisticated, although it is educable. I have yet to find anything satisfying. Any helpful suggestions will be most appreciated.

[***Ctein*** *replies: Bob, I've written a number of previous columns about tea. Type my name and tea into the search box to the right of the column and they should pop right up. You can find some recommendations there.*

As with coffee, tea varies hugely in caffeine content but it's typically much less. Tea runs anywhere from 10-60 mg per cup while coffee runs from 60 to 200 mg per cup. You can find a lot of good information about this online. The Mayo Clinic has a very nice page.

If you're trying to go nearly caffeine-free, you can leach almost all the caffeine out of tea with a quick 45 second brew. Do that first brew, throw it away, and make the second infusion for drinking. It will have little to no caffeine in it.]

Posted by: Bob Rosinsky | Saturday, 08 August 2015 at 09:47 AM

I put the Camellia leaves in the tea pot and it came out smelling like roses.

Posted by: Herman | Saturday, 08 August 2015 at 10:57 AM

It's sometimes interesting, sometimes appalling, to see how the same word may have radically different meanings depending on how it arrived in English. You're using 'puer' to mean a type of tea. It also has a much less savory meaning associated with ancient methods of tanning hides to make leather.

Posted by: Bill Tyler | Saturday, 08 August 2015 at 11:11 AM

I was surprised how well a dishwasher tablet with enzymes (like Finish) cleaned out my coffee pot in an hour with some hot water, just soaking. Not sure if it's strong enough to dissolve tea leaves though.

I drink a variety of tea but guayusa has been my daily afternoon pick-me-up.

Posted by: John Krumm | Saturday, 08 August 2015 at 11:29 AM

My favorite tea source is Mountain Tea (http://mountaintea.com/) but the most interesting tea news I've seen lately is TeaBOT: http://techcrunch.com/2015/07/23/taste-testing-with-teabot-the-robot-that-brews-up-loose-leaf-tea-in-under-30-seconds

Posted by: jseliger | Saturday, 08 August 2015 at 02:34 PM

This reminds me of the time I had an argument with a women at work on the subject of teapot cleaning when she stated that she regularly cleaned hers with bleach.

A rinse with hot water is all it should ever have.

[***Ctein*** *replies: Steve, well, I can't see that "should" really enters into it, but I agree that scouring or bleaching out a teapot is unnecessary. Now, the screen/strainer's a whole 'nuther problem. Hot water won't unclog it.*]

Posted by: Steve Smith | Saturday, 08 August 2015 at 03:48 PM

Hi Ctein
I bought the Piao Infusion Tea Pot based upon your recommendation in a post about tea a year or so ago. When my pot became discolored and started not working well because of organic matter deposits I looked around on Google and found a set of English instructions for the pot put out by the manufacturer. They suggested using a solution of chlorine bleach with about 1 Tablespoon in a quart of water and soaking the pot in that for awhile. It works like a charm and the pot looks and works like brand new after this is done. One must be cautious with chlorine as well, but I think it is likely much safer than drain cleaner. Give it a try!
Warmest Regards
Steve

Posted by: Steve Rosenblum | Saturday, 08 August 2015 at 04:27 PM

As it happens, I was tasting teas yesterday. Spent the whole afternoon drinking teas, actually. All of them Chinese, one green, one yellow, one red/black and two puers. The latter, we brew 13 times, I think, and they still had the potential for quite a few brews in them. Well, one of them did, at least.
Interesting discussion about cleaning. My problem is that my teapots are made of clay (the whole thing, as in I don't have a metal strainer inside them), so I don't think your solution would be a good one for me. Oh well, I use a zhong most of the time anyway and that's very easy to clean.

[***Ctein*** *replies: Thomas, my recommendation is ONLY for infusers and those fine metal screens. There is little to no good reason to ever apply harsh chemicals to a regular teapot. If it's made of clay or glazed ceramic, even less. Clay is porous, glazes often have small voids and some parts of the pot (like inside the spout) may not be glazed at all. Those parts may absorb chemicals or be attacked by them. Glazes vary greatly in composition. You have no idea if your chemical will damage a glaze until you try it.*

Folks, a word of advice: do not generalize. If Practice A works for Situation B, that in no way ever suggests it is appropriate for Situations C through Z.]

Posted by: Thomas Paris | Sunday, 09 August 2015 at 02:58 AM

Oh come on! I assume most of the readers here are Americans, and yet no-one has mentioned one of the finest cleaning agents, perhaps out of reverence. I first discovered this after finding that this fluid, when drunk out of a permanently tannin-stained cup that didn't even respond to potscourers, returned the cup to pristine condition.

For small jewellery such as earrings or ornate brooches and rings, and for crockery etc, try submerging the item in Coca Cola. Fanta fizzy orange juice can also work sometimes, but when used on crockery it can leave a disconcerting yellow stain. YMMV.

Posted by: Pete D | Sunday, 09 August 2015 at 06:46 PM

And it's precisely because mine are non glazed that I know there's not much I can use. Yet, my green tea pot has leaves stuck in the spout (or at least I'm guessing that's why the flow isn't so good anymore) and I could really use some chemical help. Oh well, c'est la vie as people say on your side of the pond. Good thing I like using a zhong.

[***Ctein*** *replies: Thomas, try snaking a small bottle or test tube brush down through the spout and working it around? Otherwise.... got nuttin'.*]

Posted by: Thomas Paris | Monday, 10 August 2015 at 04:00 AM

Ctein, With all due respect there are over 2,000 varieties of grapes used globally to make wine. Most consumers (especially in the US) can only name five or so grape varieties (Cabernet, Chardonnay, Merlot, Pinot Grigio, Pino Noir...); if you get to ten then you are doing really well; and if you can get to twenty you are an expert!

The challenge is that most countries (especially Europe) label their wines by place of origin (think Burgundy in France or Chianti in Italy) and not by the composition of the grape varieties. Additionally most wines are blends of several grapes. And in the US complex labeling laws allow wineries to list only the majority grape without having to list them all. For example, a "Cabernet Sauvignon" may also contain Merlot, Petit Verdot, Cabernet Franc, Syrah, and others without having to be listed.

[***Ctein*** *replies: Michael,... which is why teatotallers like moi should not talk about wine.*

Nice stuff to cook with, I will say.]

Posted by: Michael T. | Monday, 10 August 2015 at 08:31 AM

Ctein, "... there aren't that many kinds of milks that go into cheese ... " but it isn't generally the milk that affects the flavour etc of cheeses but the almost infinite variety of bacteria and other life forms.

[***Ctein*** *replies: Richard, microbes come into play in teas, too. Explicitly so in the case of pu ers and darks (which I've written about previously) but I'm pretty well convinced they have a role in lots of teas that get aged.*]

Posted by: Richard Parkin | Monday, 10 August 2015 at 12:45 PM

FWIW, I just wanted to say that neither Ctein nor Mike should judge posts like this based on the number of comments. I do not drink tea, and I can't even say that I have any particular interest in tea. But if it comes from a source I trust and is well-written (which applies to just about everything on TOP), then I appreciate learning about something I know nothing about and getting some insight into other people's hobbies and passions. I may never comment on another TOP tea (or car or billiards) post, but keep 'em comin'!

With sincere thanks,
Adam

Posted by: adamct | Monday, 10 August 2015 at 06:13 PM

I bought a Piao I after you wrote about it. I use it several times a day at work. It's a terrific device. I've had no problems with the screen after a couple of years, but thanks for the tip about cleaning.

Posted by: Robin Dreyer | Monday, 10 August 2015 at 08:22 PM

Roger hits the nail on the head - I was going to suggest either stop-bath or another particular famous fizzy carbonated beverage as possible cleaning agent.

And the idea of increasing brew-time 50% per reuse... that's just like me and APH09 (except it was about 33% per reuse).

[***Ctein*** *replies: Tim and Roger, different kinds of clogs are dissolvable in different things. Some dissolve in acids, like darkroom stop bath or carbonated water (forget the brand-name sodas-- the other ingredients don't matter). Some in alkaline solutions. Most won't dissolve in both. So, sure give WEAK acid a try, first, and if it doesn't work, move on to a lye-based drain cleaner.*

Important note: acids may also attack parts of your infuser that alkalies won't. Yer on yer own!]

Posted by: Tim | Friday, 14 August 2015 at 07:54 AM

The comments to this entry are closed.