TEAS, PLEASE

Your guide to finding a spot of tea in WC



A recent Instagram post by the BBC News included the following quote: "I pretty much live on Earl Grey, with a little hint of vanilla." Want to guess what tea lover uttered this? A British celeb? A member of the monarchy? A social media influencer? No—that was Lars Ulrich, Danish-born drummer of the iconic metal band, Metallica, discussing how they've left behind their hard-partying ways in favor of kinder, gentler beverages. (By the way, add some steamed milk to that tea he mentioned and you're drinking a London Fog, but we're getting ahead of ourselves.)

Tea is the most widely consumed beverage in the world besides water. Read that again. Here in America, however, it's always played second fiddle to coffee. In a fascinating post on the website Teabloom, the theory is proffered that this can be traced back to the Boston Tea Party and the subsequent Revolutionary War, when John Adams referred to tea as "a traitor's drink." During that war a 10-year boycott of the beverage pushed America towards growing coffee and away from its dependence on Britain for tea.

Fast forward a couple hundred years, and tea consumption in the US has increased dramatically—partly because of people turning to its soothing effects to help them cope with the pandemic. According to the Tea Association of the USA, on any given day over 159 million Americans are drinking tea, and it can be found in almost 80% of US households.

So, if Lars Ulrich found himself in West Chester, where could he find a great cup (or pot) of tea? Believe it or not, your favorite coffee shops—and a new tearoom. Here's the breakdown.

Cathey's Coffee Bar

"I believe coffee shops should serve tea because honestly, not everyone likes coffee—or sometimes tea just sounds like the right move for the day," says Cathey's Coffee manager Abbie Smith. "Coffee shops should be about creating an environment where everyone feels welcome, a space to enjoy life's moments with whatever you choose to drink."

Apparently, quite a few of Cathey's visitors choose tea. "I would say close to 50% of our customers ask for tea, if you're including chai lattes, which we offer in both vanilla and classic masala," Abbie said. "And we always offer a chai special—they're really fun and popular."

If you're not familiar with chai, a brief tutorial: it's the Indian word for "tea," and in that country is a black tea that is boiled with milk and sugar or honey. The masala version includes spices, typically hints of cardamom, cloves, and cinnamon, and the "latte" aspect is from the frothy steamed milk used for a café latte. If you want an extra kick, add a shot of espresso and voila: a dirty chai latte.

"Matcha lattes are also part of the mix!" Abbie added. Matcha is a high-grade green tea that's been ground into a powder which is whisked into hot water rather than steeped—and in the case of a latte,with steamed milk.

"We have both hot and cold tea options," Abbie told us. "We offer a variety of hot loose leaf teas that change with the seasons, but we always have staples



like Earl Grey, black, green, English Breakfast and at least two herbals." They use Ephrata-based Pureblend Tea.

With iced tea season upon us, you're covered here, too, according to Abbie. "Our iced teas are always the same and all unsweetened: black, green, passion-berry,and blood orange—the last two being herbal options. And seasonally, we offer iced tea-lemonade specials that change weekly through the spring and summer."

If you know Cathey's Coffee, you know it shares space with Dia Doce Gourmet Cupcakes, owned by Cathey's daughter-in-law, Thais da Silva Viggue. On our recent visit, we ordered a ginger lemon honey tea and an espresso, then asked for a recommendation on a cupcake to split after hearing another customer in front of us ask "What cupcake would go with this?" as the selection of the latter is dizzying. We went with carrot cake. Apparently, this is common practice. "We want everyone to have the best possible experience, and being able to explain what would pair well is a big part of what we do—although it's hard to go wrong when cupcakes are involved!"

And yes—coffee shop manager Abbie drinks tea, too. "I love our masala chai lattes with oat milk, the spices are so incredible. And when I'm not feeling 100%, I can't get enough of our ginger lemon honey loose leaf tea!" We second that emotion.

Mimi's Tea Cottage

If you want to take your tea consumption to the next level, you need a tearoom. By the time you read this, Karen Klein's charming venue, Mimi's Tea Cottage, will be open for business on High Street, serving teas, scones, and other baked treats that harken back to traditional afternoon tea.

When we spoke with her, it was still undergoing renovations from its former incarnation as Meatball U, but she'd already received numerous requests to book events like bridal and baby showers and birthday parties. Even in the state it was in, we could see the enchanting

Elegance on High Street

Mimi's Tea Cottage looks like something out of a aristocratic Victorian dream, but's nestled along High Street in downtown West Chester.

touches by local designer Chrissy Gizz of Creative Customsi—right down to the quintessential UK phone booth (this one is pink rather than red) just inside the front door. Reclaimed wood, floral touches, chandeliers, and bathroom sinks consisting of bowls dropped into an antique dresser and a Singer sewing machine complete the charm-to-spare vibe.

The front of the space is a gift shop, with porcelain teapots, sweet treats, and collections of teas that Karen is putting together. "I think I've tasted 37 teas so far," she said. When we met, she was narrowing down her collection, with equal time for black, green, rooibos, and herbal selections. The main space is divided into two dining areas separated by a wall for (semi) privacy, with a total seating of 40.

Karen will be serving afternoon tea (as opposed to the more formal high tea) in the British fashion, with a tiered tray of tiny temptations. "We'll be doing everything from the little tea sandwiches, which are savory, to all the treats, including scones." Destination afternoon tea was a tradition started by her late mother when she and her sister were children and continues now with their own daughters. And when Karen retired from the corporate world and was looking for a project, this seemed like a natural fit, and West Chester "hands-down" her favorite locale.

And the name? "Mimi is what my grandchildren call me," Karen said. "They are my loves."

Gryphon Café

On our recent visit to Gryphon Café, co-owner Len Mojzes stopped by briefly to chat. The conversation turned to the pot of Blue Eyes tea on the table, and within minutes we were steeped (see what I did there?) in conversation. The man knows his tea, is enthusiastic about sharing that knowledge and changing things up to entice customers—both coffee drinkers and tea sippers—to come along for the ride. Gryphon also has one of the largest selection of tea-in-coffee-shops in town.

In the black teas category—which by the way contain about half the caffeine content of coffee—there are four at Gryphon: Early Grey, "graceful with its bergamot oil and citrus snap;" Gryphon Breakfast, which Len describes as "crisp, medium-bodied classic;" Sunbather Red, a rare Taiwanese hybrid; and Monks Blend, with vanilla, caramel, and Sri Lankan tea.

As for green teas, which have about half the caffeine content of black teas, there's Jasmine Phoenix Pearl, scented with Jasmine blossoms; Strawberry Green, Sencha infused with strawberry essence; Wild-Bush Kamairicha, with notes of corn silk, butter, and alfalfa; Blackberry Sage Oolong, with herbal and berries complimenting the earthy oolong; Forever Spring, lightly oxidized, richly flavored oolong from Taiwan; Bonfire Summer, a roasted tea from Japan; and Moroccan Mint, a brisk blend of mint and green tea.

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>
> **-Len Mojzes, Gryphon Café**



Steeped to Order

Gryphon has a selection of loose leaf teas, like their Blue Eyes, a fruit and flower herbal with a beautiful color and stunning aroma.

Looking for herbal tea, with no caffeine content? Try Tranquilitea, a local, soothing blend of herbs and flowers; Lifting Lemon, a local tea with Lemon Verbena, Lemon Balm, and Lemongrass; Blue Eyes, "our classic fruit and flower tea;" Vanilla Almond Rooibos, "creamy and nutty goodness;" and Peppermint, organically grown in Washington state.

Since it was right in front of us, Len remarked on the versatility of Blue Eyes, which incidentally is the most gorgeous shade of... pink. "Since it is an herbal, you can also leave it steeping for as long as you like, and you won't get any of that bitter taste that can happen with the others. It's always juicy." It was served—along with a cup and saucer—in a tea press pot, where you soak the leaves in water until the desired taste, and then press them down to the bottom of the pot.

Len says they've slowly been adding fun, higher-grade teas "...in hopes we can find those tea lovers in town," as coffee still outsells tea here by a fairly large margin. "We sell tea by the cup

> *I'd say the demand for tea is pretty huge.*
>
> **-Andrew Lamont, Turks Head Café**

and in bulk as well. Our Wayne location does a lot more in tea sales, and has a wider selection than we do now. We have just started playing around with Nitro Tea. It's the same basic concept as Nitro coffees but with tea. You can get a really nice, creamy flavor with the right ones. We're hoping people try them this summer!"

Len says he is coming around to the tea scene himself. "I started out mainly into coffee, but over the years have found myself slowly switching to tea, and now drink it around a quarter of the time."

Turks Head Café

Before we get into the excellent London Fog we sat sipping in the cozy outdoor seating area at Turks Head (next to a splendid good dog named Hooper), a hat tip to Andrew Lamont. After a couple of missed connections in getting some quotes for this story, he took our call even though he was getting married the next day. That's dedication, but Lamont Coffee, which launched Turks Head Coffee Roasters in 2016, is a small, family-owned business, and that's just how they are.

Andrew is a co-owner—along with brothers Tommy and Mike, and "PR guy" Jerry Kane, of Turks Head Café, which occupies the former Fenn's Coffee on Church Street. The interior has been given a bright and appealing overhaul, with lots of light, lots of wood, and lots of your favorite beverages.

You'll find all your coffee best-loved brews here—and maybe one of your new favorite teas. I did. "We feature Harney & Sons tea," Andrew told us. "It was started by two brothers, and my dad [Joe Lamont] met them at a coffee show about 30 years ago. We've been carrying their teas ever since."

Online at Lamont Coffee, you can find and order 37 varieties of Harney & Sons;



A Diverse Audience

> Turks Head made their name as coffee roasters, but a large portion of their cafe customers prefer tea, with many opting for their London Fog.

in the shop, you'll find about 16, ranging from a classic Paris black tea to a raspberry tea, from a hot cinnamon spice to a white vanilla grapefruit. We handed over an organic Earl Grey Supreme tea bag from the display shelf to the barista who made that lovely London Fog.

"I'd say the demand for tea is pretty huge here," Andrew said. "Some people only drink tea—I'd say 30 to 40% of our customers drink tea." This goes beyond customer pleasing, although that absolutely comes first. It's just good business sense, he said. "It's pretty hard to deny the high profit margin of tea."

Although there's seating inside, downstairs and upstairs, they'll be focused more on the outside with the advent of summer. "More plants, more seating—and we definitely want to do iced tea in the summer. We're also thinking about a Nitro tea using a Harney & Sons' black tea mixture."



And yes—if you used to frequent Fenn's for the Alcoholics Anonymous Meetings as well as the coffee, the team at Turks Head Café is arranging for a comeback. "Definitely bringing the AA meetings back—we're talking with the organizers now, finalizing days and dates. It's just good for the community."

Although he's a co-owner, Andrew said his role has always been behind the scenes, taking care of the wholesale side, inventory, and deliveries. That's changed a bit now with the coffee shop. "It's really nice to interact with the people!"

Mayday Coffee & Shop

When Mayday Coffee & Shop blazed into town in March, the focus was on the coffee, the cool but warm space, the sense of community, and the flowers—oh those flowers But yes... West Chester's newest coffee hot spot offers tea, too. We walked in on our first visit after many coffees elsewhere and were kinda jangling, so the soothing hot chamomile served in an earthenware mug we ordered was just the ticket.

That sense of community is the priority for owner Austin Piona. "Trying to be inclusive as much as possible, Mayday provides all these tea options for the non-coffee drinker," he told us. "It also allows people to have a completely different drink during the same day." [Reporter's note: This. I've done this.]

"We offer six different types of loose leaf tea here," Austin said. "We also offer a Chai Tea Latte, a Matcha Tea Latte, and Lavender Honey Black Tea Latte, which are not loose leaf teas." Those six consist of two herbal teas, Alpine Berry and Chamomile; two green teas, Tropical Green and Tamayokucha; and two black teas, Early Grey and Assam Breakfast. "Two Leaves and a Bud is the company we source our teas from. They sell very sustainable tea that has received many organic certifications."

Some of the "pros" of offering tea at a coffee shop are the same pros you'd see offered by diehards and converts in general. "Tea can have some very strong calming effects, plus some of our tea options offer a decent amount of caffeine for those who don't want coffee, but still want a 'pick-me-up'," Austin said. "Both the matcha tea latte and chai tea lattes are very popular, but now our most recent drink, Berry Tea Lemonade, is made with our Alpine Berry herbal tea." Austin is a big fan of the latter, and of Alpine Berry iced tea. He's not alone, estimating that about 30% of his customers order chai, matcha, and loose-leaf tea.

"Herbal tea doesn't have caffeine and is also mostly water," he said. "I drink tea more than coffee."

All In The Details

Mayday knows that appearances aren't superfluous, and their chamomile tea is a perfect example of an idyllic cup.

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