

ASIAN HOTEL & CATERING TIMES

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TECHNOLOGY
Rocking the cloud

CUTTING EDGE
The knives are out

INTEGRATED RESORTS
Market-driven spaces

FOOD
Going gluten free



Hong Kong SAR	HK\$50
China	RMB50
Singapore	S\$15
Malaysia	RM30
Thailand	Bt300
Rest of Asia	US\$10

MARKET REPORT
Cambodia, Laos Myanmar & Vietnam



Catering to the demand for fine tea, InterContinental Hong Kong's two-satyr Michelin Yan Toh Heen restaurant offers a range of speciality teas including Mandarin Zest Aged Pu Er Tea star

PROVENANCE MATTERS

At the same time the new generation of tea drinkers want “provenance, authenticity, wellness and the story behind teas.”

“Authentic hand-made teas don’t come cheap nor is there abundant supply, but this exclusivity makes them more valuable in the eyes of the consumer,” says Tony Dick, director of Tea Concepts, a leading supplier of quality and premium teas to the foodservice, hospitality and retail sectors.

Consumer education is essential, says Dick. “What is important is that the server or retailer communicates the story behind the tea so that the consumer can appreciate the immense skill that has gone into producing the tea in their pot. Ten years ago everyone seemed to want exotic flavours in their teas, from butterscotch to strawberry stracciatella to Irish whiskey with cream. Tea drinkers seem to be moving on from that fad to teas that are authentic, artisan crafted with a known provenance.



MingCha has successfully introduced the new concept tea and flower combinations

This matches the trend with other beverages such as beer, wine and water.”

Market research company, Euromonitor, recently noted that teas with a health angle are the fastest growing type in the

Hong Kong tea sector. Sometimes called functional tea beverages, these have been an important part of traditional Chinese medicine for centuries. “More recently, tea companies have been developing

TEA STORY

Next to water, tea is the world’s favourite any time drink. But all teas are not created equal. A new generation of discerning tea drinkers increasingly seek out better quality tea grown, processed and packaged by true craftsmen. Quality has its price, but true connoisseurs will pay a premium for the best, writes *Jane Ram*

Tea is more than a way of earning a living for people like Dilhan Fernando of Dilmah. He has tea in his veins, thanks to his father who has devoted his life to growing tea and introducing single origin Sri Lankan tea around the world since 1968. The beverage appeals because of what Fernando describes as the uniqueness of the natural leaves. “Unblended, fresh tea, made in the traditional, artisanal manner, offers an unmatched expression of nature through four of the five senses,” he says.

Tea has thousands of years of history in China and elsewhere, but it became popular in Europe, especially Britain, in the early 20th century. Its popularity created what Fernando describes as an undesirable commoditization, as major companies acquired a virtual monopoly of production and “tea became less a product of passion than of profit”.

It’s not all bad news by any means thanks to what Fernando calls “niche segments” that are evolving rapidly as health conscious consumers become aware of the

benefits of tea, while more adventurous palates are increasingly interested in quality.

“Value for money is necessary in every category,” says Fernando, “but in tea it is false value since the difference between a good quality, traditionally made, fresh and single origin tea and an ordinary, multi-origin blended tea is only a few cents.

“The latest trends in flavour, packaging and types of tea are currently quite diverse, with many brands migrating to the mass market, lured by the promise of a buoyant tea category.”

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The Skin-Smart spa range from Tea Concepts

functional tea beverages with an exotic list of ingredients that are focused on specific benefits," says Dick. "They draw their inspiration from across many cultures and traditions, combining the handed-down knowledge from each culture in their formulations."

In addition to their single-estate teas from around the world, Tea Concepts recently introduced two ranges of functional tea beverages from Tea Forté, the luxury tea brand based in the USA. The second range is Skin-Smart, antioxidant amplifier teas, designed to work with the body's chemistry to help protect and take care of the skin from within. The Skin-Smart teas deliver the detoxifying effect of abundant plant-based antioxidants, a strong tool in skin recovery and the fight against visible signs of ageing.

At the same time the company has been working on a cheaper tea bag brand that also provides excellent flavour in the cup for hotel in-room use. "We are especially pleased to be launching Tarlton Teas from Sri Lanka," says Dick.

Perhaps the hottest tea of the moment is made with Butterfly Blue Pea flowers (*Clitoria ternatea*). Mixologists around the world love its ability to produce a cobalt

Unblended, fresh tea, made in the traditional, artisanal manner, offers an unmatched expression of nature through four of the five senses
Dilhan Fernando, Dilmah



The trendy Butterfly Blue Pea flower tea, Tea Concepts

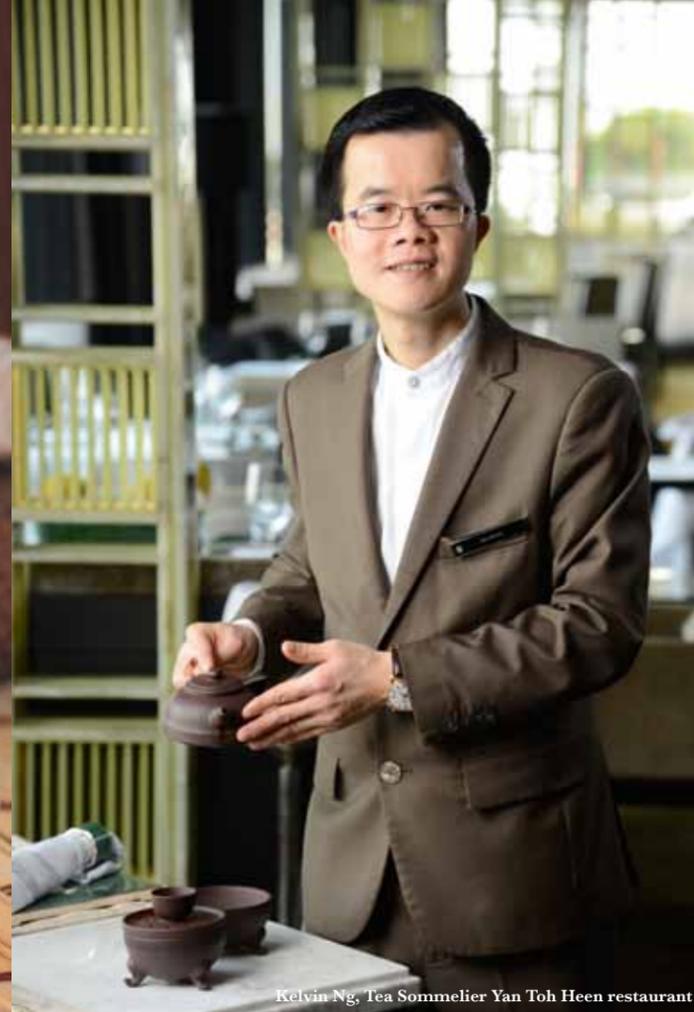
China is the world's biggest consumer of tea, averaging 7 lbs per capita, per annum, a retail market of US\$9-billion. Next in order in terms of retail sales are Russia, Japan, USA, Germany and India. Interestingly approximately 80 per cent of tea consumed in America is iced.

blue beverage that turns purple when an acid like lemon juice is added. It also creates dramatic blue ice cubes. And, best of all the brewed tea is full of antioxidants, says Dick.

HIGH END BREWS

The growing interest in all aspects of fine tea has given rise to a new interest in tea pairing. A skilled tea sommelier advises diners what beverage will best accompany their meal. "Customers are becoming increasingly knowledgeable," says Kelvin Ng, Tea Sommelier at InterContinental Hong Kong's 2-Michelin star Yan Toh Heen restaurant. "They are looking for rare and wild tea leaves, which have a full-body, or for tea which has been aged for more than 10 years. Vintage tea has no bitterness or grassy taste and has a unique herbal (Chinese medicine) aroma," he says.

The coming trend will be for "White Tea, especially White Tea leaves from



Kelvin Ng, Tea Sommelier Yan Toh Heen restaurant



Traditional method for hand-bruising Dan Chong oolong tea, Tea Concepts

Fuding," says Ng. "The wild white tea leaves, have a special sweetness and a crispy taste with an extra red date sweetness."

"Our clients and customers are looking for single origin teas," says Vivian Mak, who founded her premium award winning brand, MingCha, almost 15 years ago. At the same time, MingCha has successfully introduced new concept tea and flower combinations designed for different genders. "One of our proud creations is a combo made with a very fine red tea from Fujian and premium grade Rose Buds from Zhejiang. We name it 'For Her': it was a big hit when launched and it is still a popular choice for hotels, corporations and agencies as a gift." **AHCT**

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