

1 Modern Tea Shops

TRADITIONAL TEAHOUSES HAVE A CERTAIN ALLURE, but a fresh crop of sleek, modern tea shops are introducing tea to a new audience: the young and hip. At Tavalon Tea Bar in New York City, live DJs draw people in and a menu of custom tea blends seeks to show them that tea is worth paying attention to. Co-founder and CEO John-Paul Lee, 29, became acquainted with tea while living in London for a year, working as a management consultant. He was struck by the diversity of flavor and healthfulness of fine loose-leaf teas, and by tea's unfulfilled hipness in the U.S.. He teamed up with his friend Sonny Caberwal, 29, a corporate attorney, to open Tavalon on a busy strip of 14th Street, near Union Square, in early 2006. "The average American perceives tea as something that you drink with your pinky in the air," Lee says. "We wanted to take away that perception."

True to their mission, Tavalon is free of doilies and crumpets. What the tea-curious will find there, in addition to ambient tunes, are a clean white boutique-like interior; tea-infused cupcakes and cookies; and a selection of "mixes, remixes and uncuts"—loose-leaf blends and single-estate teas hand-picked by an in-house tea sommelier. "It's the right time for tea," Lee says. The duo opened four more New York-area tea bars last year, with streaming audio from the Union Square shop's DJ booth, and plans are under way for an in-house record label to distribute compilations of their tea tracks.

A handful of like-minded trendsetters have opened similarly modern, clean-lined tea bars in other cities. In Philadelphia, Remedy Tea Bar has been "serving the hot and the cool since 2005." Seattleites get their fix of organic teas and tea cocktails at Remedy Teas, where the leaves are displayed in laboratory-chic test tubes. And Chicago's Argo Tea Cafés are beloved for their signature drinks, like the Teappuccino, MojiTea and Hibiscus Steamer. Even Texans dig tea when it comes from the loose-leaf bar at Tempest Tea in Dallas. But

the word's still out on whether Los Angeles hipsters flock to the Standard Hotel's Sunday Tea for the chef-picked tea menu and tea cocktails, or just for the scene.



Tavalon Tea Bar in New York.
LEFT: Remedy Teas in Seattle.

Tokoname Teaware

WITH THOUSANDS OF YEARS to develop, tea culture is as rich as the brews themselves. Traditional teaware recalls tea's history and gives us a sense of continuity. That, combined with the simple beauty and unmistakable style of the pieces, is why we're captivated by Tokoname teaware. The Tokoname area of Japan has been producing pottery for a millennium, and its style represents an accumulation of influences as diverse as Buddhist ceremonies (for which it was originally developed), Yixing pottery and aesthetic trends from the last 1,000 years. Graceful and streamlined, Tokoname teapots have a timeless feel, and this Plum Blossom teapot (\$30, rishi-tea.com), with the trademark cone handle, satisfies our contemporary sensibilities while reminding us of tea drinking's storied past.



Chris Cason