

World Tea Buyer's Guide: Winners Reflect

Monday, 18 August 2008

With the recent release of the [World Tea Buyer's Guide](#) final edition, WTN decided to check in with some winners.

We wondered how they felt, now that the dust has settled, about the World Tea Championship and World Tea Ratings, results of which are included in the Buyer's Guide. To find out, we asked the following group of participants about their experience:



- Benjamin Harrison, co-owner of [Rishi Tea](#), which had the most winning teas (seven) in the hot tea class;
- Manik Jayakumar, CEO of [QTrade Teas & Herbs](#), which tied with PeLi Teas for three winners in the hot tea class;
- Angela Justice, sales manager for [Adagio Teas](#), which was the only company to win in both the hot and iced tea classes;
- Pete Leonard, CEO of [PeLi Teas](#), a newcomer to the business with three winners in the hot tea class; and
- Rona Tison, vice president of [Ito En](#), which had the most winning teas (four) in the iced tea class.

Highlights of their answers follow.

Q: What was it like, competing in the World Tea Championship?

Harrison: It was a lot of fun. ... The tea community is a small place, and we know and saw all the other teas we were competing against. The competition was stiff.

Jayakumar: I think it was exciting. We were excited to take part. We entered 15 teas, and 14 of them got into the finals. We are the market leaders of organic and specialty teas in the country, so this is routine stuff for us.

Leonard: We entered late, so it was a little hectic getting ready, but we enjoyed the whole experience.

Q: Were there any challenges, any improvements you would recommend?

Harrison: The timing was a challenge, because it was on the doorstep of new crop time for some of the greens and whites. In a perfect world, that date would be adjusted to accommodate the actual tea seasons, so everything would be on a fresh crop basis. I understand that's a tall order.

Jayakumar: No. 1, the categories were very China-oriented, in hot tea, on the specialty tea side. ... No. 2, if I am taking part in the competition, I shouldn't be judging in it.

Justice: What I would love to see is, more judges that are retailers rather than wholesalers, particularly those that are highly respected in their filed.

Q: If you had to single out one factor that contributed to your winning, what would it be?

Justice: The jasmine bloom was from Fujian Province, hand-tied, and the primary thing we're looking for in all our teas is taste. We tasted over 20 different versions of teas from different growers in different areas, so we could compare them and find the best tasting. It's a very selective process.

Leonard: Having traveled more than 20 times to China in the last two-and-a-half years, I have to say that I fell in love with tea in general. ... We spend a lot of time working hard at it, so there wasn't one tea we preferred over the others. I truly believe all our teas are championship quality.

Tison: We have a 40-year history, and were the first company to bring green tea in an RTD form and to have that legacy of revolutionizing green tea, even in Japan. To bring that here to the U.S., and be recognized by our peers was very rewarding.

Q: What do you think is the role of the event in the industry? Will you continue to compete?

Jayakumar: Yes, we want to support it and make it grow. It was very exciting to a lot of people.

Justice: I had been talking with former employers and friends about how we needed this for the tea industry: a place where we could be compared tea-to-tea on even standards. Without competitions or a third party judging them, it's very difficult for customers to tell how teas rank.

Leonard: Absolutely! We'll probably enter more now that we're not a newcomer on the block.

Q: What would you say to new entrepreneurs in the business, who look to winners like you as a role model?

Harrison: My overriding advice is, decide what you're good at early on and stay true to that. There are so many different things you can do with tea that it can become easy to be distracted.

Tison: It's clear that the industry is growing, that people are becoming more tea drinkers, and people who are converting to drinking tea are more knowledgeable. I think it's only natural that we help bring that to the marketplace. We have to communicate the value of our teas to the industry and to the consumer.

George Jage, president of SFG Group (which produces the World Tea Championship, Ratings and Buyer's Guide, as well as World Tea News), described the inaugural Championship as "an incredible undertaking" that "created a lot of excitement and controversy in the industry and media."

Although it was not without its challenges, Jage added, the company plans to continue improving and defining the event. "In the end, we believe it was all worth the effort, as this represented one of the most significant initiatives in the specialty tea industry in the U.S."

» No Comments

There are no comments up to now.

» Post Comment

Only registered users can write a comment.
Please login or register.

[Back]

RESOURCES

- ☐ BUSINESS DIRECTORY
- ☐ INDUSTRY EVENTS

Sign up for e-News

The Tea World in
your inbox...



subscribe

World Tea Expo



May 2 - 4, 2009

Mandalay Bay Convention Center

Las Vegas, Nevada USA

www.worldteaexpo.com

Syndicate

RSS	0.91
RSS	1.0
RSS	2.0
ATOM	0.3
OPML	SHARE IT!

User Login

Username



Password



Login

☐ Remember me

[Lost Password?](#)

No account yet? [Register](#)

News From Around the Web

- ☐ DINNERWARE; 10 Years To Perfection In a Teapot
- ☐ The You Docs Tip of the Day: Drinking green tea may help burn fat
- ☐ Ballet company hosts Clara's Tea
- ☐ WSJ: Revolution Is No Tea Party
- ☐ Haiku Tableware

Most Popular on WTN

- ☐ Green Tea Antioxidant Study Yields Diabetes Surprise
- ☐ Stewart Cuts Ribbon on SipTea
- ☐ Harney Has Lived Tea's Ups and Downs
- ☐ Gastelu Launches Social Networking Site for Tea
- ☐ ITO EN Takes a Shot at Oolong