



Teapots come in a variety of shapes, sizes, and styles, whether they are delicate family heirlooms (opposite page) or ornate antiques (above). Japanese-inspired teapots by Rishi Tea (below) are distinctive in their shapes and patterns, and are a must for Japanese tea-ware collectors.

The teapot is a simple vessel—short and stout, with its handle and spout, as the childhood song indicates. A teapot doesn't have to be beautiful, whimsical, or ornate to quietly steep tea while simultaneously holding the heat of the water. But variations in the teapot's composition, shape, and design certainly add to its charm, giving it a side job as either a cherished family heirloom or a fanciful addition to a treasured collection.

The teapot's roots date to the fourth century, when the ewer was used to hold and transport water. This decorative pitcher evolved to become a piece of art, showcasing a unique craftsmanship and growing in popularity as a commonly used container. The ewer may have influenced Chinese pottery, as local potters fashioned pitchers of stoneware while also introducing an improved method of steeping tea leaves. Form met function, as craftsmen from the Ming Dynasty improved upon the stoneware version of the teapot with the trademark blue and white porcelain variety during the 16th century. Ming porcelain often featured dragon and phoenix motifs, but it was the blue and white color scheme that set Chinese pottery apart.

As tea arrived in Europe in the 17th century, so did an early form of today's teapot. Spouts and handles made these small vessels popular because they became more ergonomic. By the early 1700s, porcelain was

