

# Tea, Green

Experts serve up their favorite herbal brews, all steeped in sustainability

**TEA IS HUMANITY'S OLDEST FLAVORED BEVERAGE** and remains its most popular. The fragrant leaves have linked hemispheres, spawned revolutions, and inspired religious rituals. But the global tea industry also has an ugly history of deforesting, damaging biodiversity, and overusing pesticides. To promote more-enlightened sipping—and, by extension, production—*Sierra* beseeched five tea experts to name their most preferred brew. As with last issue's coffee connoisseurs ([sierraclub.org/coffee](http://sierraclub.org/coffee)), we imposed two caveats: They couldn't plug a product to which they have financial ties, and the endorsed tea had to come from a company immersed in environmentally responsible practices.



**DAVID KARR** is the cofounder and director of Sebastopol, California's **Guayaki** ([guayaki.com](http://guayaki.com)), the top North American seller of yerba maté. His teas are organic, rainforest-safe, fair trade certified, and produced with solar power.



**GRETCHEN ILER** is a certified tea sommelier, a designation that requires three years of study and testing. She works as a consultant for tea companies, restaurants, and spas and lives in Lake County, Illinois.



**AHMED RAHIM** is the CEO of **Numi Organic Tea** ([numitea.com](http://numitea.com)), a minimal-waste company that sells fair trade, pesticide-free specialty teas and herbs obtained directly from farmers. Rahim, a master tea blender, lives in Oakland, California.



**DIANA ROSEN** ([dianarosen.com](http://dianarosen.com)) is the founding publisher and editor of the *Tea Talk* newsletter and has written five books about tea, including *Meditations With Tea: Paths to Inner Peace* (Citadel, 2006). She lives in Los Angeles.

"TEN TEA's Organic Oolong is from Wuyi Mountain in China's Fujian Province and a favorite among gong fu tea drinkers. This handpicked oolong is organic, which is rare in the world of oolong teas but gaining in popularity. Prepare the tea according to the instructions and the resulting infusion will be full-bodied with floral notes and a long, nutty finish."



**TEN TEA, Organic Oolong** | [tentea.com](http://tentea.com) | \$11.50 for 4 oz.

"My favorite ecofriendly tea is the Pu-erh Ginger loose-leaf tea, imported from Yunnan, China, by RISHI TEA. It's USDA organic, fair trade certified, and harvested from ancient trees. A zesty combination of ginger and orange peel complements the pu-erh's earthiness. It's mellow, with a hint of citrus and just enough spiciness."



**RISHI TEA, Pu-erh Ginger** | [rishi-tea.com](http://rishi-tea.com) | \$4.50 per ounce

"I admire the ability of **TRADITIONAL MEDICINALS** to produce excellent functional teas while committing to sustainable business practices. They are a pioneer in our industry, established in the mid-1970s and still a leader in reducing environmental impact. They have the world's largest solar-powered tea factory. Each winter I stock up on their **Organic Echinacea Plus**, which has a mild, minty taste and keeps me going through cold-and-flu season."



**TRADITIONAL MEDICINALS, Organic Echinacea Plus** | [traditionalmedicinals.com](http://traditionalmedicinals.com) | \$5.49 for 16 tea bags

"Swaraj 'Rajah' Banerjee, the owner of **MAKAIBARI TEA ESTATES**, uses Rudolf Steiner's biodynamic farming techniques. His efforts show in resilient earth, glossy tea leaves, and a healthy workforce. Banerjee lives with his workers, supervising every step. His hand-processed **Silver Tips** tea has a delicate sweetness rarely found among Darjeelings; its lighter essence speaks to me. Prices vary but are always reasonable for such quality."



**MAKAIBARI TEA ESTATES, Silver Tips** | [makaibari.com](http://makaibari.com) | Price varies (around \$8 per ounce)

Lore has it that tea was first imbibed in China about 5,000 years ago, after leaves of the *Camellia sinensis* plant blew into an emperor's pot of boiling water.