

= Argo Tea =

Argo Tea is a chain of tea cafes that was founded in the Lincoln Park community area in Chicago , Illinois , in June 2003 . It is now headquartered in Chicago 's Loop community area . It had more than a dozen locations in the Chicago metropolitan area before expanding in 2010 to New York City , where it opened four locations that year and then expanded to St. Louis and Boston . As of October 2011 the chain had 26 locations and distribution in over 3 @,@ 000 grocery stores . In its first decade , it has grown simultaneously with the tea market . Its expansion into grocery stores occurred in 2010 and 2011 . Arsen Avakian is the current chief executive officer . By spring 2013 , it had opened in Beirut with plans to add locations in five Middle East cities by year end .

Argo Tea primarily sells a variety of hot and cold tea @-@ based signature drinks . In addition , it offers about three dozen international varieties of loose @-@ leaf tea (tea brewed from loose tea leaves , as opposed to tea leaves in bagged tea) , coffee , baked goods , small entrées , and teaware . The tea menu includes a variety of black , green , white teas , and natural herbal teas , served hot or iced . Argo Tea has formed a special relationship with Whole Foods Market to distribute Argo products . According to the description in Bloomberg Businessweek , Argo 's specialty foods include pastries , sandwiches , salads , and quiches . Argo markets from a lifestyle perspective with awareness of modern design and sustainable environment . It also sells audio CDs .

= = History = =

Argo set out to be the Starbucks of tea . Argo Tea was launched in 2003 by three partners : Arsen Avakian , Simon Simonian , and Daniel Lindwasser . Avakian and Simonian are boyhood friends from Armenia . They grew up in Yerevan and emigrated in the 1990s to the United States , where Simonian , a computer scientist , and Avakian , a startup company specialist , teamed up following the dot @-@ com bubble . Avakian first came to the United States as a Fulbright scholar . Lindwasser is a Frenchman who moved to the U.S. in 1997 . He is a former management consultant . Avakian 's father , Yuri , holds multiple wind and solar technology patents .

The original 900 @-@ square @-@ foot (84 m²) cafe for Argo Tea , which had 24 indoor seats and 20 patio seats in its 2003 configuration , is located at 958 West Armitage Avenue on the corner of Sheffield Avenue in Chicago . The venture , which opened in June 2003 , was the first tea cafe in Lincoln Park . It was across the street from a Starbucks . Argo borrowed its name from the story of Jason and the Argonauts in Greek mythology . The original store was financed by its founders , who were all experienced management consultants , without outside investors . They used their own credit cards as lines of credit . Chicago architect Mark A. Cuellar was hired to design Argo 's early cafe interiors .

At first , the company experimented with expansion by distributing boxed dry tea at Whole Foods , but quickly restructured . Barely six months after opening , Argo was planning expansion in Chicago and beyond . Late in 2004 , Argo signed a lease to make its first expansion beyond its original location (at Loyola University in the Near North Side community area on Rush Street) . By the beginning of 2006 , there was a third location (in the Loop community area on Randolph Street near State) with a fourth on the way . In March 2006 , Argo expanded to the South Side of Chicago at the University of Chicago Medical Center , which is located in the Hyde Park community area , with a location that is described as a teaosk , a themed kiosk . By 2007 , the company decided to pursue consistency across its locations and began a centralized concentrate brewing process . After five years , the franchise had 10 locations ranging from 1 @,@ 000 to 2 @,@ 000 square feet (93 to 186 m²) , all in Chicago . In Chicago , several of the early cafes , including the 11th inside Merchandise Mart and the 13th at O 'Hare International Airport , have been located in close proximity to a Starbucks storefronts with the thought that Starbucks is expanding demand for tea . By February 2009 , the company was still a Chicago metropolitan area business with all 13 of its locations . In July 2011 , Argo became the first outside retail tenant of the Tribune Tower in six years when it leased space .

Argo opened its flagship New York City location in January 2010 by signing a 10 @-@ year lease in the Flatiron Building . It promptly followed with a Chelsea neighborhood storefront and then a Columbus Circle store in the spring . It opened a total of four cafes in New York City in 2010 , taking advantage of the late @-@ 2000s recession , which allowed the company to procure prime retail locations such as Union Square , Columbus Circle and the Flatiron District at reasonable rates . The business replaced a Dean & DeLuca in the Union Square neighborhood . Among the investors in the New York City expansion were Sam Zell , Glen Tullman and Oxford Capital . In May 2011 , the company added its fifth tea room in New York City .

By 2010 , the company eschewed its aspiration to be the Starbucks of tea , " Starbucks is more like Windows PC ? it 's old , less healthy and designed for everyone ? and we want to be more like Mac : young , healthy , cool and a more unique , innovative brand . " Avakian said the company hopes to build the Apple of tea . At the time , it was opening its 18th store (14 in Chicago and 4 in New York) and had \$ 10 million in annual sales , making it the largest chain focused on tea , according to Technomic Inc .

In 2011 , the San Francisco Chronicle credited Argo as being the company that caused the 21st century tea shop revolution , while Time ran a story claiming that Argo has gotten America to drink tea . As of 2011 , the United States market had grown to over 3 @,@ 000 tearooms , according to the Tea Association of the USA . According to Beverage Digest , between 2006 and 2009 , coffee consumption declined 2 @.@ 3 percent in the United States , while tea consumption rose 4 @.@ 5 percent . The growth of teas has caused Starbucks to drop the word coffee from its name and build the Tazo brand . Starbucks had a total 2010 revenue of \$ 9 billion , while the entire tea industry was \$ 7 @.@ 7 billion , including \$ 443 million by the top 6 U.S. tea chains . By early October 2011 , Argo claimed 26 locations in four cities (Chicago , New York , Boston and St. Louis) and distribution in 3 @,@ 000 grocery stores around the country including Whole Foods , Safeway and Dominick 's .

When the lease came up for renewal at the original location on April 30 , 2013 , the company did not extend the deal , but the company would open greenhouse location the following month . By March 2013 , bottle drinks , which they had begun in 2010 were 20 % of the company 's business . By that time Argo Tea had opened a business location in Beirut and had planned to follow that with one in Doha in April 2013 . It also intended to open 2013 Middle East locations in Abu Dhabi , Dubai , Kuwait and Riyadh . By September 2013 , Doha was opened and that month a second Beirut location opened .

= = Products = =

Tea is the second most consumed beverage in the world , after water . Argo was founded in response to a realization that Americans had so few tea offerings that they generally were unfamiliar with anything but bagged teas . At the time , most tea retailers either supplied bulk tea for home brewing or traditional sit @-@ down service , but Argo focused on premium specialty drinks in paper cups . Meanwhile , a minority of Asian immigrants from countries such as India , Vietnam and China where tea is the national beverage were spreading some of their traditions . Argo endeavored to emphasize the healthy aspects of tea as an alternative to coffee . When it was founded , Argo was part of a field of blossoming tea cafe franchises meeting a burgeoning demand . By 2002 , there were 1 @,@ 100 tearooms with sit @-@ down service . In 2003 , retail sales of tea totaled \$ 5 @.@ 1 billion , and in 2005 , as the specialty tea market was growing 20 percent per year , the total retail tea market was expected to surpass \$ 10 billion by 2010 .

Argo began with 35 teas from around the world , including black tea , green tea and chamomile tisane as well as exotic teas . From the outset , it included a mix of traditional Asian teas as well as teas from exotic locations . One of the companies staple drinks came from a vacation to Ipanema beach in Rio de Janeiro in which Avakian paid a juice bar operator to close shop to allow him to experiment with flavor combinations during business hours . Several of Argo 's teas are seasonal . One of its signature drinks is the teappuccino , a black tea mixed with steamed milk and froth , which the company has trademarked . The menu leverages the new wave of specialty teas that may be

served sweetened or spiced and that are blended with milk , sparkling water or fruit juices . In the early years , its favorite offerings were Bubble tea , Pomegranate tea , Matte Latte or Chai tea and milk and Tea sangria .

In its first years , the company sold illy brand coffee . While the company imports its teas from sources around the world , it now brews its teas at a centralized location in downtown Chicago . Argo started out selling loose tea in 1- and 4 @-@ ounce bags or in bulk . Among Argo 's Americanized drink varieties is a version of the national drink of both Argentina and Uruguay , the mate , which Argo serves as a Mate late . By 2010 , the company ventured into the grocery store market (Whole Foods and Treasure Island) with bottled specialty teas in Chicago and had plans for its own bottling facility . By the time the company opened its New York locations , it offered fair trade certified coffee . In 2011 , the company expanded its distribution to grocery stores around the country .

According to the company 's press release for the opening of its 20th location in 2011 , the menu included " all natural tea @-@ based signature drinks , over 30 varieties of loose leaf teas , fair @-@ trade organic coffee , fresh @-@ baked pastries , specialty foods , and a selection of teaware and accessories . The signature drink menu features healthy and unique options such Maté Laté ? with earthy maté , almond and milk , Green Tea Ginger Twist ® with Japanese green tea and ginger root , MojiTea ® with cool mint tea and lime juice as well as many others . The food menu features a wide assortment of freshly baked gourmet pastries , French quiches , and a SpecialTea Foods made with tea @-@ infused ingredients such Teanie Panini , Tea Bites and wholesome Teapot Grains . Argo Tea ? s ready @-@ to @-@ drink bottled beverages can also be found outside the cafés , in the finest grocery retailers across the country . " Bloomberg Businessweek summarized Argo Tea 's business as follows : " Chicago @-@ based Argo Tea strives to redefine the message of tea as a healthy beverage and lifestyle choice , to create unique , all @-@ natural tea @-@ based beverages and to provide customer experiences that reflect modern designs and a sustainable environment . " The tea ware and accessories include tea pots , high @-@ tech tea infusers , and wide variety of tea cups .

= = Social efforts = =

Although there are both proponents and opponents of the health effects of tea , Argo tea is a proponent of the health benefits of tea and advocates for its use in research . Certain varieties of teas when properly prepared produce antioxidants that have been said to assist in preventing cancer and reducing blood pressure and cholesterol levels . In addition black tea , which contains L @-@ theanine , is credited in one study with mobilizing the immune system 's disease @-@ fighting T @-@ cells . Another study also says teas may reduce halitosis . Argo Tea has donated a large amount of white teas , which have high concentrations of antioxidants , to the University of Chicago Hospitals , contributing to cancer research efforts there . This contribution prompted the University of Chicago to invite Argo to open the kiosk inside the hospital lobby . The company also holds tea seminars in conjunction with Northwestern University and the University of Chicago to build awareness of the possible health benefits and research possibilities for tea .

Argo tea advocates for sustainability , demonstrates concern and awareness of environmental issues in their business plan and uses charitable donations to promote research as noted above . The company has an environmentally friendly business plan that includes encouraging use of reusable service @-@ ware such as ceramic mugs and plates and washable silverware by its dine @-@ in customers . Argo also markets reusable tea tumblers , which enable its customers to obtain discounted pricing on its drinks . The company considers sustainability and environmental consciousness in all phases of its business including supplier , operations , store design and product decisions .

= = Corporate information = =

Although the company was founded in Lincoln Park , the official business address is at the third

location in the Loop (16 West Randolph Street Chicago , IL 60601) . The company has mostly part time employees , but offers medical benefits to employees who work 20 hours per week . As of September 2007 the workforce was about 150 people . A year later the estimated workforce was 200 .

Despite its wide ranging menu , as of 2011 , 80 percent of Argo 's \$ 15 million annual sales came from tea beverages .

In August 2011 , Chicago Alderman Brendan Reilly ceded control of Connors Park in the Gold Coast to Argo tea for development of a 1 @, @ 200 @-@ square @-@ foot (110 m2) store . The area had been neglected by the Chicago Park District and become run down . In exchange for a 15 @-@ year lease , Argo assumes responsibility for maintaining the park . The business opened its location in the park within a greenhouse in late May 2013 .