

Outpost Exchange
Tea Shops
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1,020 words

In Milwaukee, tea's popularity is brewing and the result is that there are more and more places to enjoy quality tea and partake in the ritual of what some term the "elixir of life." The English tradition may be the one with which most Milwaukeeans are familiar. Two locations to enjoy a more relaxed version of the English style afternoon tea include Watt's Tea Room (761 N. Broadway, 414-290-5720) and the Pfister Hotel (414 E. Wisconsin Avenue, 414-273-8222).

Watt's has been serving tea in their second floor tea room since 1925. The quaint, cheerful interior elicits fond memories of special occasion lunches, often had after perusing the beautiful fine china, silver and other exquisite gifts located on the first and second floors. Once a bastion for "ladies who lunch," the Tea Room now sees as many power business lunches as social tete a tetes. Although one can order tea at breakfast (9:00 a.m.-11 a.m. Monday through Saturday) or lunch (11:00 a.m.-2:30 p.m. Monday through Saturday), the most traditional tea service is High Tea, which takes place from 2:30 p.m. to 4:00 p.m. Monday through Saturday. For \$12.95 per person, visitors enjoy tea, scones, finger sandwiches, a fruit cup and an assortment of desserts. Although Watt's currently serves bagged tea, they are in the process of changing over to loose leaf tea, which is considered by tea connoisseurs to be the best quality (see article pp. XX). They currently offer a variety of black and green teas and herbal infusions.

A recent excursion to sample high tea in the lobby at the Pfister Hotel revealed a number of small business meetings as well as cozy social gatherings taking place. Served Wednesday through Saturday, 3:00-5:00 p.m., the Pfister's High Tea is an elegant, intimate affair punctuated by live classical piano music. The dark woodwork and extraordinary ornamental decorations of the recently restored, 107-year-old Pfister Hotel lend a comfortable sophistication to this tea experience. There is a choice of three price levels here: \$15.95 per person includes your choice of tea (black or herbal) and a tiered tea tray of sandwiches, scones and cookies. For \$19.95, a glass of house champagne is added, while for \$22.95 one receives a glass of Moet and Chandon champagne. All teas are loose leaf.

If you are interested in a more international and casual experience, two shops on East Brady should be just your cup of tea.

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Jacobus Tea Shops—Add One

With more than 100 loose leaf options, Rochambo (1317 East Brady Street, 414-291-0095) has one of the country's most extensive selections of teas and herbal infusions, including more than 40 different green teas. Rochambo, which is owned by Melissa and Michael Honkamp, also features such rare brews as white and pu-erh tea and approximately 20 herbal infusions to address a wide variety of health issues. Some of these include Magreb Mint, which has mint and fennel, for digestion; Constant Spring, with Chinese herbs, roots and ginseng for longevity; and Raspberry Sunrise to tone the uterus. Open from 7: a.m.-midnight Monday through Friday, 8:00 a.m.-midnight on Saturdays and 9:00-midnight on Sundays, house tea runs \$1.25 for a cup and \$3.00 for a pot, while the rare teas start at \$2.25 a cup and \$5.00 a pot.

The laid back, bohemian atmosphere offers a smoke free environment on the first floor, with smoking allowed on the second floor. The Honkamps, who traveled extensively in Europe to research their coffee and tea house business, display art collected from those journeys. The exterior comes across as a sort of hip "painted lady" in varying shades of bright green. Outdoor seating is also available and is the perfect spot from which to watch the eclectic goings on of Brady Street. Delicious goodies from various area bakeries provide a tasty accompaniment to the tea selections. These include vegan cookies, muffins, crumb bars and scones from East Side ovens, burritos and cinnamon rolls from La Boulangerie and Susie's cheesecake.

The couple also own the Jazz Estate nightclub (2423 N. Murray Avenue), which may very well be the "only bar in town that serves green tea," laughs Melissa Honkamp.

Die-hard coffee man Matt McCluthy, who took over ownership of Brewed Awakenings (1208 E. Brady Street, 414-276-2739) about a year ago, has read the tea leaves, so to speak, and has decided to go with high quality, loose leaf Rishi Tea to replace the bag style served until now. "I just want good tea and it's cool that Rishi is local," McCluthy said as he unpacked the first delivery of his new tea. "Like good coffee or good beer, good tea is better if it's fresh and high quality. Once you drink this, it's hard to go back to the bag," he added. Although the shop will remain predominantly a coffee house, it will also now offer about 10 different teas, for \$2.00 per pot or to go pint.

McCluthy is making other changes around Brewed Awakenings, including adding retail space next store where, in addition to selling his own roasted coffee, tea and some tea drinking accoutrements will be sold.

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Jacobus Tea Shops—Add Two

The sunny, upbeat shop features works from local artists that change monthly and world music that wafts around, mingling with good smells of the fresh delights baked on site. 1950's diner style furniture completes the informal atmosphere that is ideal for reading a book, writing in a journal or visiting with a friend. Outdoor seating is also available and is the perfect way to spend a bright afternoon. Tempting menu items range from burritos and wraps to a large selection of unique sandwiches, all made there. The entire store is smoke-free.

“I wanted the feeling of a neighborhood café that welcomes everyone—students, tradespeople, professionals—all sitting side by side. That doesn't happen in other places,” McCluthy said. “But it can happen in a coffee/tea shop.”

He adds, perhaps in deference to his guest, that Brewed Awakenings is a place “older people can go and still feel cool. It's not sterile like some chain places.”

Brewed Awakenings is open weekdays 7:00 a.m.-midnight and 8:00 a.m.-midnight on weekends.

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