

## Living the tea lifestyle

The total experience includes investing in accessories, food and more

By JOANNE FRIEDRICK

As most retailers have discovered in recent years, tea isn't just a drink, it's a way of life. Those customers who truly enjoy tea are always seeking new avenues to explore, whether it's a different type of brewing method, a new variety of tea or a food designed to enhance the tea-drinking

experience.

This presents plenty of opportunities for tea purveyors to beef up their departments, especially those who deal in specialty and premium teas.

According to George Jage, president and co-founder of World Tea Expo, the specialty tea market is growing at a faster clip than its traditional mass merchant cousin.

And, he said, tea popularity is translating into bigger tea sections in stores—about twice the size devoted to coffee.

Cheryl Templeton, marketing director at Globe Trends, said stores such as Wegmans have devoted entire aisles to tea and have even named

the section to draw attention to it. "They're taking it very seriously," she said. Tea sales, she said, "are going through the roof. There is so much more variety in the stores. People can find whatever they want."

"Tea is a trend; it's sustainable," said Jage. He said both aging Baby Boomers and the generation following them "are very globally aware and community oriented and interested in health."

Positive health claims continue to create that buzz around tea, said Jage. Green tea, which has had the most studies associated with it, has also experienced the most growth, he said, while white teas are popular, but are less accessible because of their

limited production globally.

Templeton said consumers are beginning to recognize what both white and green teas are all about. Her company, which represents British tea stalwart Taylors of Harrogate, has also come out with its own line, Harrisons & Crosfield, which explores some of the current tea trends.

The Harrisons & Crosfield line, Templeton said, offers white teas, flavored green and organics in black, white and green. The brand also has jumped on the bandwagon with pyramid sachets, which allow the water to flow more freely around the whole tea leaves. Templeton said this line is especially appealing to Baby Boomer tea drinkers "who want something elegant to serve to their friends."

Taylors of Harrogate, meanwhile, has joined the Fair Trade effort with its breakfast tea, said Templeton. Fair Trade teas, which represent teas for which growers are paid a fair market price, are building a following. Jage said



George Jage, president and co-founder of World Tea Expo.

many companies are moving into organic and Fair Trade, although it still represents less than 20 percent of the industry.

He said many products are organic and/or Fair Trade, but companies aren't investing in having it certified and labeled as such.



The idea behind San Francisco Chocolate Factory's Tea Lovers Chocolates is to pair certain chocolates with green, white or black tea to enhance the tasting experience.

Organic and Fair Trade teas, along with greens, whites and herbals are resonating with customers at South Dakota's Someone's In The Kitchen. Espresso Bar Manager and Barista Beth Shupe said the store does well with organic and Fair Trade teas from both Republic of Tea and Rishi.

At the espresso bar, Shupe samples tea every day, either hot or cold, depending on the time of year.

"A lot more people are interested in tea and how to prepare it," she said, noting a steady business in tea pots and infusers.

For retailers wanting to keep up with the changing tea industry, they can take in Jage's tea-centric trade show.



GlobeTrends' Harrisons & Crosfield brand includes a line of whole leaf teas offered in silk pyramid tea bags.

World Tea Expo, which began as the Take Me 2 Tea trade show in 2003, has expanded and evolved along with the tea industry.

Jage said this year's show offers specialized tracks for people in the industry because so many are now at different levels of knowledge and experience. To get a better handle on how consumers view tea, Jage said food industry guru Phil Lempert would present the results of a consumer survey in his keynote address.

The show, like the industry, is made up of all aspects of the trade, said Jage, from growers to retailers. And among retailers, he said the industry is seeing growth among all channels, including independent tearooms, of which there are about 4,000 in operation; foodservice, which represents 80 percent of tea sales; and grocery, specialty and mass merchants. In this latter

group, said Jage, health-food retailers such as Whole Foods and specialty chains like Trader Joe's are indicative of the major areas of growth.

Another area that is getting into tea is its beverage counterpart, coffee shops. Coffee represents "a large number of entrepreneurs who are selling a hot beverage," explained Jage. "The coffee industry is starting to open its eyes to tea," he said, realizing it means more opportunity for profit in the channel.

Templeton agreed that coffee retailers are taking on more tea as are restaurants. "Restaurants are interested in having a variety of tea to offer their patrons," similar to a wine list, she said.

Although tea is becoming more available at the foodservice level, many tea drinkers enjoy the at-home experience as well.

In those instances, companies such as Bodum and Old Dutch International are providing the accoutrement to make tea preparation more enjoyable and elegant.

Jeff Malkasian, vice president-sales for Bodum, said the company's tea-making equipment fits the trends

among value-conscious tea drinkers.

Roomy, clear tea pots with removable infusers can be used for the new style of blooming tea, while those who enjoy iced teas can choose from among four SKUs to fit this growing category. Removable infusers are also designed so teas don't



Bodum's clear glass tea pots allow consumers to see the tea-brewing process.

overbrew and become acidic or bitter, said Malkasian.

And a mug press can turn anyone's favorite mug into a tea maker, or a coffee maker, he said.

Having added tea to its Web site recently, Mark Jackson, director of commercial sales for Whole Latte Love, said tea in pyramid bags and flowering teas are part of the trend.

The flowering tea from Teaposity that Whole Latte

# Retailers stock a variety of teaware



The traditional copper tea kettle still has a following among Old Dutch International's customers.

Love offers comes from one farm and one source, he said. "It's a great visual display and a super quality white tea." To aid the presentation, the site offers the clear glass teaware to go along with it.

Jackson said flowering teas can be brewed a couple of times; then the bud is put in cold water and displayed.

About five years ago, Old Dutch International expanded beyond its copper tea kettle line and into Japanese cast iron tetsubin teapots. The Unity brand pots, which feature porcelain enamel lining and stainless steel infuser baskets, can be used for any type of tea, explained Benjamin Kan, president of Old Dutch. But, because they are Japanese style, they are geared for green and white teas.

Kan said the tetsubins appeal to a broad market of retailers, from the tea stores and tea houses to caterers and general housewares and giftware merchants. Old Dutch has about 50 SKUs in its tet-

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subin line in various colors, shapes and sizes. The smallest holds about 8 ounces of tea, said Kan, while the largest can



Old Dutch International has specialized in Japanese tetsubin tea pots, offering about 50 SKUs under the Unity brand.

brew 50 ounces.

The company continues to supply copper tea kettles, added Kan, but with the price of copper these days, more are being constructed of stainless steel with a copper exterior.

Another line of stoneware pots and cups explores different shapes and colors. These teapots, which sport stainless steel lids, handles and infusers, come in colors such as traditional Black and White, along with Really Red, Aqua Blue, Sprite Green and Pretty-in-Pink.

Based on the popularity of tea, Kan said he is continuing to think in that direction as he

looks for new product lines.

If accessories are one area retailers can focus on for their tea-loving customers, food is yet another.

Along with the traditional tea treats of scones, curds, jams, shortbread and the like, companies such as San Francisco Chocolate Factory are expanding the horizons with chocolates that team with different teas.

Louis Rasky, who handles winery sales for San Francisco Chocolate Factory, said the firm's Tea Lover's Chocolate is the newest concept. Already successful with Wine Lover's and Coffee Lover's Chocolates, the tea-related line pairs 31 percent cocoa white chocolate drops with green tea; 38 percent milk chocolate with chai; and 55 percent cocoa with black teas.

Rasky acknowledged that tea has unique characteristics and with thousands of teas

available, the chocolates are paired more broadly. "We always go for balance," he

said, noting milk chocolate would work best with chai's sweeter and slightly spicy characteristics, while darker

chocolate can handle the stronger characteristics of black teas.

For retailers carrying the product, which was introduced in a prototype form at the Winter Fancy Food Show in San Francisco, Rasky said he envisions it both within the tea section, but also in the chocolate aisle.

He said the concept of wine and chocolate has been accepted and as tea moves into the wine range with different varietals and estates, "people came to us and asked about what we had for tea. We felt the tea audience was underserved." **GN**



Old Dutch International offers a line of stoneware cups and tea pots with stainless steel lids, handles and infuser inserts in three shapes and six colors, including Really Red, shown here.



Teas created especially for iced tea brewing are catching on in the industry.



Harrison & Crosfield provides organic green, white and black teas.