

FIT to a TEA

Pots are beautiful as well as functional

By MARY BILYEU
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When we think of tea, we might conjure notions of a proper English tea at 4 p.m., complete with scones and a delicate bone china tea set.

We might smile at the thought of little girls dressing up for a tea party, pretending to serve treats to both their playmates and their teddy bears with safe, sturdy plasticware.

We might think of the pot of fragrant tea served at Chinese restaurants, an essential complement to our lo mein or General Tso's chicken.

We might think of the steaming, soothing beverage when we're not feeling well, or the brisk taste of something iced during a sweltering summer.

We might even think of the Mad Hatter.

But the world of tea extends beyond taste to the teapots that are used for brewing and serving.

Simple, sleek Japanese tetsubin cast iron pots, featuring decorative designs in relief on the exterior, have been in use for more than 600 years. Lovely glass vessels are perfect for showing off blooming teas, which flower as they steep. And Ohio's Hall China Co., in East Liverpool, developed a two-step firing system in the early 20th century that brightened American ceramic teapots with vivid colors.

According to the website Teavana.com, "One legend claims that the discovery of tea occurred in 2737 B.C. by the Emperor of China." Since then, many of the teapots created for the popular drink have been designed to be both utilitarian and beautiful.

Elaine Terman of Elaine's Tea Shoppe, 3115 W. Sylvania Ave., says there is an "unbelievable variety of character and history and shapes" among tea pots and other vessels for brewing tea.

These can range from yixing (pronounced yee-ZHING) pots made of so-called purple clay from the Jiangsu region of China, which have been in use since the 15th century, to the highly-mechanized Breville One-Touch Tea Maker in the Teavana store at Franklin Park Mall, which will heat the water, steep the tea, and keep your beverage warm all at the push of one button.

And a new trend in brewing tea is to use the French press that is traditionally reserved for making coffee.

There are many opportunities around town to have your own version of a tea party, or to admire prized collections of tea pots.

Sweet Shalom Tea Room, 8216 Erie St., Sylvania, offers themed teas each month, with March being dedicated to the Irish in honor of St. Patrick's Day. Clara J's Tea Room, 219 W. Wayne St., Maumee, hosts popular Wild Wednesdays, pairing lunch at the tea room with a movie at the Maumee Indoor Theatre for one price.

Mariko Johnston is teaching a class this semester at the University of Toledo, about the formal art of Asian tea ceremonies. Ms. Terman regularly offers tasting classes to introduce people to green, black, white, and oolong teas, and Teavana offers daily tea samples.

Southview High School in Sylvania even has a tea club, whose purpose is to explore the world's many varieties of tea.

Whether a tentative novice or a knowledgeable expert about tea and the wide array of teapots, one thing remains a constant:

"There's always more to learn," says Sara Velasquez, co-owner of Sweet Shalom.

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THE BLADE/KATIE RAUSCH

A Hall China Co. teapot with a lid hook is one of the teapots used at Sweet Shalom Tea Room. The business offers tea for sale as well as cozy places to drink tea made in several types of pots.



THE BLADE/KATIE RAUSCH

A variety of teapots and their accessories are featured at Clara J's Tea Room in Maumee.



THE BLADE/JETTA FRASER

A Yixing teapot and cups, made in the Yixing region of the People's Republic of China.



THE BLADE/KATIE RAUSCH

Teapots by Romero Britto at Clara J's Tea Room in Maumee have bold colors and whimsical designs.



THE BLADE/JETTA FRASER

A cast iron teapot with a glazed interior.



THE BLADE/LORI KING

A blooming teapot at Teavana at Franklin Park Mall.



THE BLADE/KATIE RAUSCH

ABOVE: A variety of teapots and accessories at Clara J's Tea Room in Maumee.



THE BLADE/JETTA FRASER

LEFT: Teapots for nature lovers at Elaine's Tea Room in Toledo.