

Flavours of Your Tea

By Rosha Raj

TEA – the most consumed beverage of the world has more than one mundane avatar. In India, we have many cooked versions of it: with *masala*, milk, sugar, spices and any other additive that is old as grandma's memories or as fresh as nouveau ideas. However, here we discuss the blends that make it possible to have tea in many reincarnations where herbs, spices, essences and flavours have been added.

Tea Blending

Tea blending is the trend that is catching all over the world. Every new player hopes to create a winner. Blending tea is not everybody's forte. Old masters are reluctant to share information gathered over decades.

The process, the tea selected and the flavouring – all three factors are important in a successful flavour of the tea. And of course it has to be consistent. Jennifer Geronaitis, from USA tried to learn it under John Harney and soon was wise to her limitations. Her first lesson: 'dried fruit alone adds little or no flavour to a tea blend. The flavour comes from essential oils mixed with tea.' Her



second lesson was, 'Good Quality natural oils hold their flavour for the life of the tea,' and thirdly, 'never use flavourings to mask bad tea.'

As for how the consistency factor is provided, big companies keep their processes secret. Somebody like John would use a small cement mixer with plastic liners to blend his teas. He says, 'The most important thing is to use a

different liner for each blend so as not to mix flavours by mistake and the key is adding essential oils in right proportions. The mixer allows the blends to mix more evenly.'

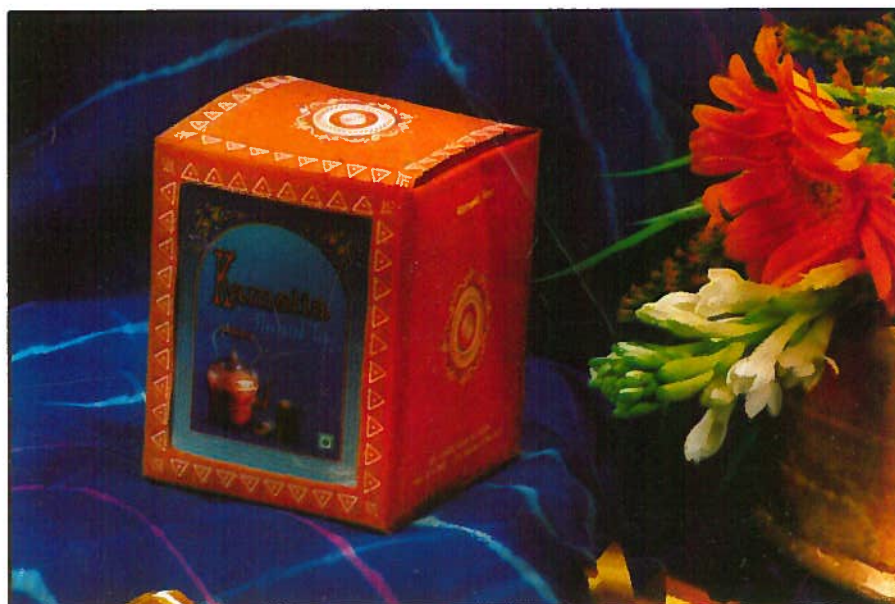
A good quality flavoured tea will give a fragrant cup that has flavour but which also allows the true taste of quality tea to shine through. Mridul Tiwari, a woman of many talents

related to the world of tea, including auctioning, with inbred understanding of fine quality of tea for she comes from a tea growing family background, is the spirit behind her company, Kamelia Beverages and has an infectious passion for TEA.

Tea Bags Arrive!

In the ever increasing desire to decrease the mess of making tea the bags were introduced. A typical tea bag is small, porous paper, nylon or silk bag with tea inside that is used for brewing tea. The tea remains inside the bag as the tea is brewed, making it easier to dispose without any mess.

First commercial marketing of teabag was in the tea and coffee shop merchant Thomas Sullivan of New York around 1904. This was fine silk though now they are increasingly being made of paper. Today empty tea bags are available where consumer can fill the tea themselves thereby getting a personalized blend of quality tea that is variable in choice, with the convenience of a tea bag. A tea bag must have enough space for the tea to



infuse.

The constant lament of the consumer is the poor quality of material filled in the tea bag. Yet there are blenders, traders and visionaries who are attempting to change that. They are fashioning the tea bag with a difference. Mridul Tiwari is one such crusader. She says, 'With years of

experience and study of Indian tea, we as tasters, blenders and herbalists combine the freshest full-leaf teas, fruits, herbs, spices, and natural flavourings with scientific accuracy to produce natural and health flavours.'

Mridul is offering tea bags that are like the designers Chanel and Hermes; Dior and Gucci. And she is doing it

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with precision, class and offering bespoke solutions to those hungry for exclusivity. Right from fancy shapes to funky ingredients, Mridul is on a mission to popularise tea in a different segment.

Keepsake Tea Bag

A designer new tea bag that is an investment for the sole buyer is valued at \$14,000. It has been made by the jewellers. Boodles to celebrate the 75th birthday or PG Tips and has been handcrafted using 280 diamonds! It took three months to be handcrafted in England. Proceeds of the sale will go to Manchester Children’s Hospital and rest assured this tea bag would never be ‘used and discarded.’

Types of Indian Tea

Darjeeling – the most aromatic tea grown in the slopes of Darjeeling.

Kangra – rich in flavour tea grown in the Himalayan range of Kangra valley

Assam – the strong flavoured tea from Assam area

Terai & Dooars – Himalayan



foothills of West Bengal, the perfect coloured tea.

Nilgiri – the unique flavour of CTC tea comes from the hills of Nilgiri

Original Flavour of the tea is dependent on the kind of leaves plucked – the younger the leaf, more flavourful is the tea. A fine pluck means that only the buds of new growth have been plucked; a coarse pluck means older leaves were plucked. A normal traditional pluck is when two leaves and a bud are plucked.

The eight stages of tea before it is auctioned would include:

- Plucking leaf from the fields
- Withering of green leaf in troughs
- Rolling of leaf to make orthodox tea
- Processing in CTC (crush, tear and curl) machine to cut grains to make tea
- Fermentation of Leaf
- Drying of leaf in the Dryer
- Sorting of Tea for different sizing
- Packing and Despatching.

Flavours in Blending

More popular tea herbs can be categories in broad terms as:

Floral: Lavender, Jasmine, Rose, Chamomile, Red Clover, and Chrysanthemum

Lemony/Citrus: Lemon, Lemongrass, Orange, Lemon or Lime Peel

Tart: Hibiscus, Rose Hips

Spicy: Cinnamon, Clove, Ginger,

and Cardamom

Sweet: Liquorice, Fruits, Aniseed, Fennel

Woody: Sage, Rosemary, Thyme, and Marjoram

Mints: Peppermint, Spearmint, Catnip, Hyssop

Of course, each of these have regular followers and those who partake of them for associated benefits like catnip is relaxing and aids digestion as also provide good sleep. Lavender is calming relieves stress headaches. Peppermint is calming and good for digestion. Ginger is warming and stops nausea. Rosemary is recommended for anxiety, depression and tension. Thyme is a good infection fighter and a decongestant. Or any of the above may be enjoyed for the perfect taste.

Mridul who is forging ahead with her creative marketing by bespoke tea bag style and strong supply to the hospitality industry from big hotel chains to smaller tea outlets says, ‘Vanilla and strawberry flavours are easily available but these are with essence flavourings and are totally synthetic. Blending with genuine stuff is far more enriching and



flavourful. As far as there is no moisture in the added flavour ingredient, the shelf life is as good as the tea and flavour should not mask the essential taste and flavour of tea.’

‘Tea is the same family as Rose, therefore it would be better infused in tea,’ says Mridul. She has experimented with Marigold flower, Orange Peel and even Khus root! When appearance of packaging is as important as the visual and flavour appeal, Mridul is not afraid of trying new concepts and is constantly imbibing newer thoughts in her offerings. Obviously her passion about tea is more intense than most others who would just be the sales team of a bigger outfit.