

Making the Tea of the Future with Unusual Ingredients

By Linnea Covington
Contributing Editor

Yes, those are little red lips mixed in with that pile of black tea, and tiny chocolate chips too. The tea I'm looking at is called *Read My Lips* and is one of about 150 unique blends produced by David's Tea, a company based in Canada who tend to put whimsical additions into their blends that both flavor and make the tea stand out. In this case, the lips give the beverage extra sweetness that melds with chocolate and mellows the Chinese black tea into a dessert-like drink that they tote as a dessert replacement. The thing is, it's good, and so unlike any tea I have seen before — and, it's just the beginning.

"We are serious about some things like our sourcing and quality," said Sarah Segal, president of David's Tea. "But we have fun with the naming and giving the teas personality."

This new take on the ancient drink comes at a time when many people see tea in three main ways: For British people, drunk by older folk, or as health drink. While all of these stereotypes are true, this makeover of tea that many companies have taken on aims at luring younger people into a hot, steamy cup.

"Our most important goal is to have a tea for every taste," said Segal, who at 28-years fits the new demographic of tea drinkers. "We have been inspired by a lot of different places and a lot of different things, and just like ice cream and chocolate companies, we like using the whole ingredients."

Some of the elements popping up in tea today include cacao nibs, peppercorn, various nuts, coffee beans, and hefty chunks of dried fruits like papaya, strawberry, and pineapple. To



be fair, tea leaves have been mixed with flavors for centuries, but where an old-school enhanced tea would have essence of citrus and maybe a spattering of tiny dried fruit pieces, today's blends have additions Chinese tea masters would be rolling in their graves to discover. Yet, as tastes change and younger people lean more toward soda, coffee, and energy drinks for their caffeine kick, this revolution in ingredients may bring people closer to the source.

"It tends to be a great vehicle to ease people gently into the world of tea," said Mary Lou Heiss, author of various books on



tips

Maya Tea's Manash Shah recommends looking for teas that aren't weighed down with large chunks of fruit. "We have to be careful about the addition of ingredients that are there just to pretty up the tea, not give it flavor," he said, adding that just because you might see the pieces of fruit, doesn't mean it will taste like it. Choose interesting teas where the tea leaves dominate the blend. That way you are getting quality tea with a little flavor added in, not the opposite.

tea including *The Story of Tea: A Cultural History and Drinking Guide*. "Flavored teas are good when done well, but when it's done badly, they turn it into candy or a hot soft drink."

At Heiss' shop Tea Trekker in Northampton, Massachusetts, she and her husband Robert lean away from muddling up their tea with ingredients like the ones used at David's, but the proprietress said they have slowly adopted a few into the mix after people kept asking about it. Chocolate proved a big one, and the couple worked hard at finding a balance with cacao nibs and chocolate essence to create the Bonfire blend. Other teas get a spattering of flavor like their seasonal spring Mad Hatter, which combines raspberry, strawberry, apricot, rose, and lavender, or Sleighride, a tea that incorporates pink peppercorn and forest fruits.

On the more wild side, Mighty Leaf produces a series of chocolate teas including their Mayan Chocolate Truffle tisane, which, chock full of chocolate chips, and dried chilies, apples and strawberries, tastes just like instant, spicy hot coco. With rich Pu'erh leaves, cacao nibs and pieces of dried citrus peel, their Mocha Truffle Pu'erh leans more toward a traditional blend with this modern kick.

How these combinations come to be is another twist in the tale of giving tea a facelift. "I like to look at flavor combinations that I taste in a meal or cocktail," said Manash Shah, owner of Maya Tea in Arizona. For example, the inspiration behind his vanilla mint green tea came from feeling sick in Seattle and

getting a cup of Moroccan mint and a lemon cookie from a little French café. "I felt so much better after that and I wanted to recreate that flavor pairing." The same sort of thing happened with his spicy pear and vanilla spice, which respectively came from a baked pear dessert and snicker doodle cookie.

"I think the young people will start there [with teas like the spicy pear]," said Shah. "The difference between the younger generation and the older generation is that they care about food. And how does it play in the tea world? Well, they are expecting more and that's awesome."

Modern Teas to Try

Movie Night DAVID'S TEA

While adding toasted rice to green tea is a tried and true method, this one goes further and actually puts fluffy bits of popcorn in it as well as enhancing the flavor with maple and apple.

Orange Chocolate Green Tea BY REVOLUTION

Orange and chocolate taste great in candy and in this blend of sencha tea, cacao nibs, ginger, and orange essence, it also works beautifully.



Jamaican Red Rooibos BY RISHI TEA

Many tisanes get spruced up with fruit, but this organic blend incorporates a bit of clove into the sweet schizandra berries, passion fruit, mango, and tart Jamaican flowers.

Mocha Truffle Pu'erh BY MIGHTY LEAF

With a mild dash of cacao nibs and citrus, these rich and prestigious tea leaves get a chocolate shop zest while maintaining the integrity of the brew.

Cherry Almond Black BY STASH TEA

This dessert tea gets a sweet kick from dried cherries and nutty almond essence.

