

Savoring the West

Try the uncoffee?

Lift your spirits in the region's many fine tearooms. *By Josh Sens*

Maryellen Hayes enjoys her java. She drinks it black for a morning jolt. But come afternoon, when her day downshifts to a slower rhythm, coffee leaves her cold. "I prefer a pot of Darjeeling," Hayes says. "Coffee is so, well, caffeinated. Tea is a more serene experience."

As co-owner of the Camellia Tea Room in Benicia, Calif., Hayes helps cultivate that mood in a refurbished Victorian building outfitted with lace curtains and flower-patterned teapots. A decade ago, when she opened the business with her daughter, tea awareness had barely begun to bud. Now her patrons range from tattooed teens to construction workers who sip *sencha*, their hard hats tucked beneath their arms.

With a history that reaches back 5,000 years, tea drinking hardly qualifies as something new. But it's clearly hot. Camellia (707-746-5293, www.camelliatearoom.com) is one of dozens of tea-houses that have sprung up around the West, from the cozy Beehive Tea Room (801-328-4700, www.beehivetearoom.com) in Salt Lake City to tranquil Teance (510-524-1696, www.teance.com) in Berkeley, Calif. San Francisco's Samovar Tea Lounge (415-626-4700, www.samovartea.com) is to local tea enthusiasts what a tasting bar is to wine lovers: a place to sip and explore—floral oolongs, earthy *pu-ehrs*, and grassy green teas.

Tea places vary, too. The most refined branch of Portland's Tao of Tea (503-736-0198, www.taooftea.com) sits inside the city's Chinese gardens; only teas from China are offered, along with such snacks as noodle bowls and moon cakes. HighSocieTea (775-329-8327, www.highsocie.com) in Reno takes its cues from across the Atlantic, serving tea and scones in an antique-bedecked cottage with the air of an English library.

For all the pleasures of a proper pot, many drinkers find they most enjoy the chance for quiet reflection, peaceful ritual, and genial tête-à-têtes with friends. It seems only fitting that every New Year's Eve, Samovar Tea Lounge throws a party billed as a "celebration of the human heart." Guests are treated to a gourmet five-course meal that centers, naturally, on flights of tea.



Tea fosters friendships at the Camellia Tea Room in Benicia, Calif.

À LA CARTE >>>>

Sips in the city

You won't see rolling green vineyards along the emerging "urban wine trail" on the eastern shore of San Francisco Bay, but you will find expert winemaking and welcoming tasting rooms. www.eastbayvintners.com.

DASHE CELLARS AND JC CELLARS Oakland. The French American couple behind Dashe is best known for rich and spicy zinfandels; JC's Jeff Cohn experiments with gutsy syrahs and other Rhône-style wines. (Cohn is also the winemaker at Rosenblum, next page.) Last year Dashe and JC moved in together near Jack London Square, where some 900 barrels are stacked beside the new no-frills tasting area. Both are at 55 Fourth St. Dashe: (510) 452-1800, www.dashecellars.com. JC Cellars: (510) 749-9463, www.jccellars.com.



Savoring the West

ENO WINES AND HARRINGTON WINES

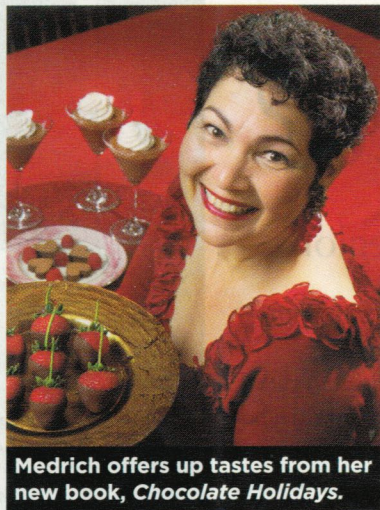
Berkeley. Two meticulous vintners craft tiny lots in an ivy-covered warehouse that's been a winery since the 1970s. While they share a passion for pinot noir, Harrington also turns out grenache, syrah, and zinfandel. 805 Camelia St. Eno: (415) 515-7227, www.enowines.com. Harrington: (415) 824-1824, www.harringtonwine.com.

LOST CANYON WINERY Oakland. With its bare-brick walls and mahogany bar, Lost Canyon Winery has the East Bay's slickest tasting room, offering delicate pinot noirs and soulful syrahs. 2102 Dennison St., Ste. A, (510) 534-9314, www.lostcanyonwinery.com.

ROSENBLUM CELLARS Alameda. In the cavernous Sawtooth Building near the old naval air station, this granddaddy of bayside wineries produces more than 40 fruit-forward wines, from chardonnay to zinfandel. 2900 Main St., (510) 865-7007, www.rosenblumcellars.com. —MICKEY BUTTS

SOUND BITE >>>

Every lover's sweetheart



Medrich offers up tastes from her new book, *Chocolate Holidays*.

When Alice Medrich was 20 and living in Paris, she fell in love—with a dark chocolate truffle her landlady made. In 1976 she launched Cocolat, a chain of Bay Area dessert shops (now closed), and still carries the torch at culinary schools including Draeger's (Menlo Park), Ramekins

(Sonoma), Sur La Table (regionwide), and Tante Marie's (San Francisco).

Q Why such passion for chocolate?

A It's probably the only sophisticated gourmet food that most people have loved since childhood. You don't have to learn to appreciate it.

Q What makes it so good?

A Chocolate melts at body temperature, releasing sensual, earthy flavors. It's a proven mood enhancer.

It can be either comforting or sexy.

Q Is it addictive?

A People who say they're addicted are eating chocolate with a lot of sugar. Really good chocolate has less sugar, so it's satisfying in little bites.

Q Have a favorite brand?

A Oh, no. That would be like only drinking one kind of wine, ever.

Q Ideas for a valentine treat?

A Maybe a super-rich bittersweet torte or a perfect, simple chocolate truffle. —DARCY BROWN-MARTIN



A winning toss at Stockton's Le Bistro

WESTERN CLASSIC >>>

Hail Caesar!

Many great salads have been born this side of the Rockies—Cobb, Caesar, and crab Louis—but it is the Caesar, appropriately, that has conquered the world, popping up on menus from Australia to Abu Dhabi. In 1924 an Italian restaurateur in Tijuana, César Cardini, created a novel dish out of garlicky croutons, grated Parmesan, and a punchy dressing of olive oil, lemon, coddled egg, and Worcestershire, all spread lavishly on canoe-shaped romaine leaves that guests ate with their fingers. This salad was not only dinner but theater: A waiter wheeled a cart over and tossed the greens tableside.

These days grilled chicken, steak, and even calamari show up in newfangled versions. Among the dwindling handful of restaurants that still prepare Caesars with old-fashioned panache are Alfred's Steakhouse (415-781-7058) in San Francisco, Delmonico Steakhouse (702-414-3737) in Las Vegas, and Le Bistro (209-951-0885) in Stockton, Calif. —JENNIFER REESE