

Tasting Ceylon tea

*The tea tasters have been sampling Ceylon teas for this Issue of **tea**. But what should we expect from a Ceylon tea? Read below to find out ...*

Go into many of the large supermarkets and you will probably see a tea (loose leaf if you're lucky) labelled "Ceylon tea". Many tea rooms state that they have Ceylon tea. But what exactly does this mean? To find out more, we turned to Robert Wilson, whose family connections with Ceylon tea date back to 1835 to the first plantations on the island of Sri Lanka, formerly known as Ceylon. Robert continues the family's interest in tea and is committed to the traditional values of 'real tea'. Through the company, Robert Wilson's Ceylon Teas, Robert is able to introduce a wide range of different Ceylon teas to the public, along with an extensive knowledge of the tea trade.

Having asked Robert to send some of his Ceylon teas for the tea tasters to sample, you could be forgiven for imagining maybe just a few packets arrived in the post. What we actually received was a large parcel containing over twenty different teas; seasonal, single estate, classic



English and other specialist teas all from this one small island; the world's third largest tea producer.

With such a wealth of tea, we decided to run this as a feature over three Issues of **tea**; focusing, for this Issue, on the single estate teas. These teas each come from one tea estate in Sri Lanka; they are not blended, nor do they have anything added to them. What they do offer is a vast range of tastes, developed through the location of the estates, its elevation, the agro climatic conditions, the manufacturing processes and time of year for harvesting.

To discover such a range of teas from one country is humbling and puts into perspective the gulf between what is generally noted as Ceylon tea and what is actually available. Added to that is the advancement of Sri Lanka as a leader in worker welfare, Government laws for employment and conditions - fairtrade in the true meaning of the word. The seasonal manufacture of the teas Robert Wilson sources means they pay prices way

above average auction prices and the packing base is on the island to add to the island's economy.

So to the tea tasting .. We have deviated from the usual format for reviewing these teas in order to give you, the reader, a deeper insight into the types of teas on offer

and the views of the tea tasters on the taste. As ever, we note that the tea tasters do not consider themselves 'experts' - they are ordinary people who like tea and recognise that their likes and dislikes may vary from yours but try to give you a 'flavour' of what they have sampled. Enjoy ...

Brunswick BOP (Broken Orange Pekoe) black tea

Maskeliya is a sub district of Dimbula, in the South Western slopes of the central highlands of Sri Lanka. This is close to the famous Adam's Peak. The Maskeliya district is open to the first South West seasonal wind sweeping up from Columbo and Ratnapura. The strength of this wind determines the route it takes and the tea estates it reaches first and this cool wind is vital to the character of the tea here, along with the hot dry seasonal weather. This tea should be bright and clear with a good coppery red colour.

Dry leaf: small, fine particles; wonderful 'classic tea' aroma; neat leaf

Flavour: lingering flavour with a hint of fresh apple; good strength but absolutely no bitterness; ideal as a breakfast tea; strong without being too strong; strong, satisfying and rounded with a pleasant woody taste.

Lover's Leap (Mahagastota) FBOP (Flowery Broken Orange Pekoe) black tea

This tea growing area is towards the Eastern edge of the central highlands before they drop into the famous Malwata valley dividing the Uva mountains to the South and East from the central mountains. As a high grown tea that is light in caffeine, it develops a very individual aroma and is drunk on the island after large meals.

Dry leaf: a 'warm' aroma; mixed leaf - colour and size; a good, fresh aroma

Flavour: flavourful with a lingering taste; a distinctive, fresh after-taste - very defined; an aromatic tea with a fresh taste that lingers.

Urawala OP 1 (Orange Pekoe) black tea

The Morawak Korale district, a sub district of Ruhunu, where this tea comes from is in the low country. The teas here grow in an area that is hot and humid with lots of sunshine. The high level of photosynthesis to the leaf produces shiny black teas unique to this area. A lighter rolling during manufacture produces a large leaf tea. With cooling machines now available a good manufacture is available, which is proving popular in the UK.

Dry leaf: long, curled, thin leaves with a fleeting hint of aniseed

Flavour: subtle but truly flavoursome and refreshing; light, delicate and distinctive taste; unusual taste - perhaps not what you would expect of a Ceylon tea, though delightful and ideally suited for an afternoon tea; a flavour reminiscent of olives, surprisingly distinct and very good.

Thotulagala Organic FBOP (Flowery Broken Orange Pekoe) black tea

An organic tea from the Southern Uva hills, with a good coloury liquor and an intense Uva 'Teay' flavour. This tea takes milk well.

Dry leaf: short, dark leaves with a mild aroma; medium sized, tippy leaf

Flavour: a very pleasant and slightly smoky flavour; a light fresh and clean taste; a delicate flavour, just right for afternoon tea.

Uva Seasonal Best light liquor FP (flowery pekoe) black tea

This tea is from a high elevation at the edge of Uva Malwatta valley. The Uva district has estates at both lower and higher elevations, as low as 2,000 feet rising to 6,500 feet, with the subsequent affect on tea flavour. Although recommended without milk, it is known for its fragrency with an edge on the pungency level, thus making it preferable to some with a touch of milk, which may soften the flavour. As a specialist tea this will appeal differently to different palates and for this reason is hard to describe - it is, as they say, 'a matter of taste'. This tea recently won a 3 star gold award.

Dry leaf: dark, even leaf; distinctive smell - liquorice-like; medium sized leaf

Flavour: bright liquor with another very distinctive taste, slightly bitter; a pungent taste; a strong aroma that you smell as you drink the tea

Uva Seasonal Best Special Edition FP (flowery pekoe) black tea

A more refined Uva tea than the light liquor tea described above. A very special manufacture that was refined and refined during the fantastic 2007 Uva quality season. Almost Darjeeling-like, with a light colour and smooth taste. A well developed flavour.

Dry leaf: dark brown leaf; twisted leaf with a distinct smell

Flavour: a pungent flavour but without bitterness; interesting and distinctive flavour that tastes like it smells.

The most frequently used comment from our tea tasters when describing these teas was 'distinctive'. This certainly challenges the idea that Ceylon tea is of one type with a single taste. Our tasters were impressed by the quality of the teas and could tell that these were high quality teas - this view didn't change whether they had a particular preference for the taste or not of the different teas. They commented that each tea had a consistent bright colour though the colour of the liquors was very varied, and none had that dull, greyish tinge associated with poor tea. Each tea had a very particular aroma and flavour and the tea tasters were surprised at how different each tea was, commenting that this created a sense of what was pleasing or not to the individual palate. They found this tea tasting very

interesting and unlike any other they had done before and are eagerly awaiting the next tasting of more Ceylon teas. One of the tea tasters commented; "It shakes my belief - in a good way - of that which I have been led to believe is Ceylon tea. I now know this is not a standard tea with a standard taste. It was wonderful to be able to discern different tastes such as olive-like or citrus-like and know that these were created through the means of manufacture alongside the climatic conditions. To understand that tea can be seasonal is a marvellous insight. Though I am a keen grower of vegetables and eating



seasonal produce, it is a concept I had not considered where tea is concerned and I find this fascinating."

tea magazine extends our thanks to Robert Wilson for providing both the teas and useful notes to go with them, explaining each tea and where it is grown. Some of this information has been reproduced in the short descriptions of each of the teas. Go to www.wilstea.com

where you can find out more about Robert Wilson's Ceylon Teas, and make purchases online. Alternatively, you can phone on:

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