



An unknown author once wrote, "Strange how a teapot can represent at the same time the comforts of solitude and the pleasures of company." In January, folks tired of an already bitter winter may try a nice pot of tea, especially to mark National Hot Tea Month. Who knew hot tea enthusiasts marked such a month, but for three women in the Kansas City area, nothing could be finer than a great cup of tea.

**PAULA WINCHESTER AND  
TWELVE WINDS TEA COMPANY**

Paula Winchester is the sort of woman who sees an adventure in each cup of tea. Her passions have taken her to China and Japan to thank those who grow tea and to see firsthand how the teas are cured and made. In 2008, Winchester logged more than 2,400 miles by bus in China. Last year, she spent time in Japan. A future trip might be to Taiwan.

Like many, she grew up with her grandmother's Lipton tea bags. The move to drinking quality teas was a gradual one. Winchester has a business called Herb Gathering, which provides quality herbs to grocery stores, caterers, country clubs and restaurants. Rather than open a teahouse, Winchester turned to the Ball family and the area Hen House stores. The 12 Hen House grocery stores, which carry her fresh herbs, are now carrying the teas from Twelve Winds Tea Company, both

together in the produce section. She just marked three years for the specialty tea business. "For the last four years, I have really discovered my passion," she says. "Teas are uplifting, calming, and always creative."

The Chinese teas are her favorites, especially one called Honeysuckle Almond Oolong. She has been drinking some Pu-erh teas, a darker tea that gets better and more valuable with age. Whether here or in Asia, Winchester continues to hone her tea skills. She received her Level 3 certified tea specialist from the Specialty Tea Institute in September. "I'm always learning from others. When we went to China, I got to experience the pride the Chinese have in their tea. Then we shared the commonality in that we love their teas too. It was our way of building relationships. Yes, I have taken a lot of classes, read enormous amounts, tasted a lot of teas, but knew until I traveled to country of origin I would not be able to speak from my heart. I am now."

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