



Gong Fu Tea

FLAVOR

By Jim Duncan

Nutrition, the "science" in which one decade's breakthrough can become the next decade's prohibition, is now studying our drinks. It's about time, as over the last 40 years, obesity rates have skyrocketed in perfect harmony with increased soda guzzling. The average American now gulps down 56 gallons of pop a year, twice his or her 1970 consumption.

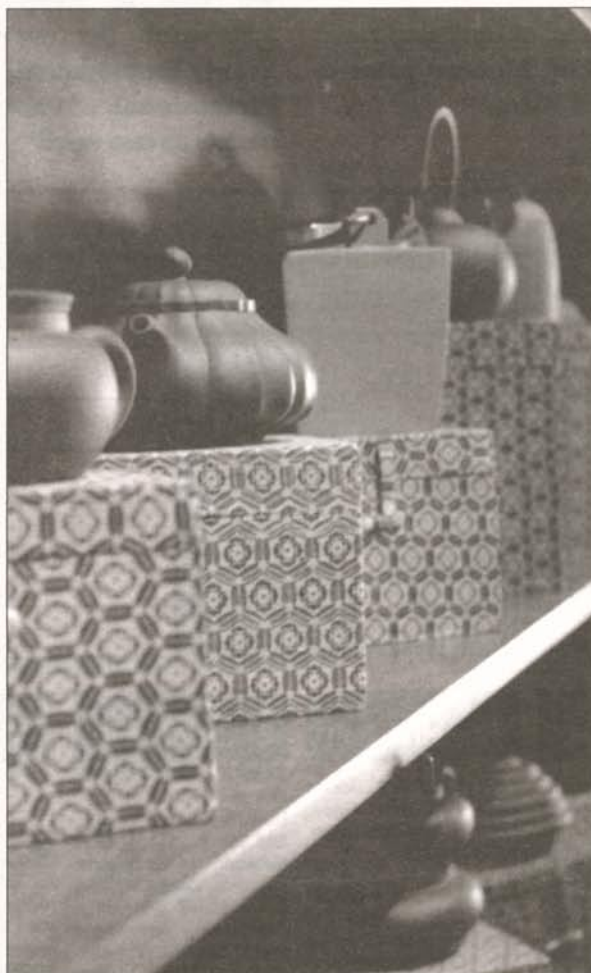
Such growth began when laboratory sweeteners replaced sugar. A 12-ounce American-made soda might now contain 13 teaspoons of high-fructose corn syrup and recent studies found that heavy soft drink consumption is the most common indicator of an obese person's diet. Interestingly, this applies to diet soft drinks as well as to those with big calories. How do they explain that? No-calorie chemical sweeteners kidnap parts of our brain and demand calories as ransom. Beverage nutrition is soft science.

Nutrition's new darlings are antioxidants, fighters of cell-killing free radicals that age us and increase our cancer risks. Red wine, grape juice, green tea and dark berry juice have been touted lately for antioxidant counts, so we went looking for healthier drinks last week. Our first stop was Gong Fu Tea, an East Village shop that introduces Des Moines to worldly leaves. Rusty Bishop and Mike Feller visited tea connoisseurs all over the world developing this quaint and charming shop in the old Antlers Lounge.

Having been to a few teashops ourselves, we vouch highly for this place. It's a serious teashop, not a trendy little franchise peddling rainbow flavored tapioca balls. Bishop and Feller provide the most informative tea menu we have seen anywhere, with culinary, geographic and historic contexts for each tea. They carry Chinese and Japanese teas of distinction, mostly green and oolong antioxidant warriors. They will help you discover why one sen cha is worth 20 times more than another, and why gyokuru is even better.

They also carry Indian and Ceylonese teas, ginseng, mate and a few herbal teas, including a sports drink tea that visited Mount Everest. They offer three types of service: Gong Fu (\$8 person); Gaiwan (\$4 person); and Western (\$3.25 pot). Scones, breads, cakes, cookies and pies, baked by Weller's wife, came with Devon cream and English preserves.

We continued our beverage quest at Live Juice Company in Metro Market where fresh-squeezed fruit juices starred, but a drink of locally grown organic wheat grass caught our eye. This superb nutritional food ("an ounce of wheat grass equals a pound of broccoli") claims



to detoxify the lymph system, lower blood pressure and suppress the appetite.

We also found Pat Peterson, at Tea and Other Comforts, planning an afternoon tea supportive of humanely raised, fresh and local foods. Her menu will include: "Thousand Year Eggs" from local free-ranged chickens; smoked trout from Heartland Fish; fresh local fruit in jasmine-lime syrup; cranberry chicken salad, with Regi's cranberries; tea sandwiches with breads from the Mast Family Farm and Vander Ploeg Bakery; shortbreads from The Flour Shop; scones; and lavender tea bread, with lavender honey for Log Cabin Apiary; and clotted cream. October 8, 3 p.m. at Metro Market. \$15. **PB**

414 E. 6th St.
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Food News

Frankenfruit is here

Hy-Vee, the store that no longer sells unpasteurized apple cider (real cider), now peddles apples that have been injected with artificial grape flavoring, in six packs. "Looks like an apple, tastes like a grape." This is where bad food ideas go for accreditation.

Those who like apples to taste like apples can find the real deal at the Downtown Farmers' Market. While many orchards have chosen the lawyers' way over the gourmets' way, Williams & Son of Runnells still press their cider without processing the taste away. \$4 gallons; \$7 for two.

Last week in California, the Academy of the Sierras opened the first-of-its-kind private school for obese children. Tuition is sympathetically hefty, up to \$5,000 per month.

Healthy Cocktails?

The pomegranate is the health food of the year with antioxidant measurements almost double red wine's and seven times green tea's, previous favorites of the crowd who would cheat death. Pom juice is supposed to retard aging, heart disease, Alzheimer's and cancer. Its makers claim it can oxidize bad cholesterol, lower systolic blood pressure and prevent hangovers.



So this first of Buddhism's "Blessed Three" (with lime and peach) is being westernized, as a cocktail mix — demand quadrupled in California since 2002, and pom-tini's were reportedly the hot drink in the Hamptons this summer. A search of Des Moines' watering holes suggested we are behind the curve. Pomegranate juice (\$4 for 16 ounces at Dahl's) is not being requested at the eight places we called, but grenadine (pomegranate concentrate) is popular at Raccoon River Brewing Company. Pink Ladies (with cream, egg white and gin), Cinco de Mayos (with tequila and lime juice) and grenadine martinis are on the radar there.

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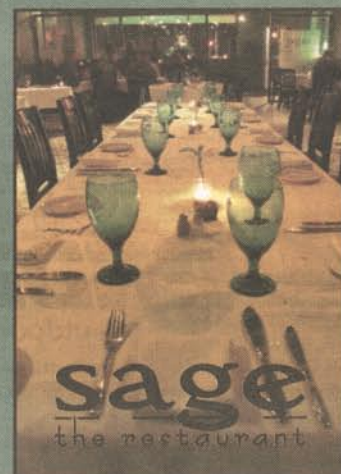
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