



Can tea trump coffee

Kristin Bradford, 24 hours

Vancouver's Infuze Tea House can brew up a cuppa anyway you like it - and then some.

Put down your pinkie, tea's new hip and healthy reputation is coaxing coffee addicts to swap their beans for leaves.

For a city saturated in coffee shops, Vancouver is starting to wake up to tea – both for the taste and the health benefits.

"Tea doesn't have to be the stale stuff that comes out of the cupboard when you go to grandma's," says Brian Takeda, co-owner of Infuze Tea House, the ultra-chic new spots for a cuppa on Denman and Cordova streets.

Takeda flies his tea in fresh from Japan and India, and tea bags are blasphemous in his books.

"The leaves don't have space to unfurl," he says of the resulting flavourless brew, plus chlorine bleach is used to make the bags white. At Infuze, leaves are set free in water and removed with a mesh cup.

It was only a matter of time until the West Coast got hip to tea in that it's been heralded for centuries for its antioxidant properties, says Takeda, citing the fact that Japan's huge tea-drinking population has the highest amount of smokers, yet the lowest rates of lung cancer.

Even major coffee chains like Blenz have hopped on the tea wagon. Its popularity in Vancou-

ver is due to "a collision of demographics – a healthy lifestyle and a large (Asian) population already familiar with tea," says Blenz marketing manager, Walter Sawadsky.

Matcha is to tea what espresso is to coffee, and has been a big hit with both Blenz and Infuze customers. Blenz offers it seven different ways, from hot in a traditional tea ceremony bowl to a matcha latte.

Naturally caffeine-free, matcha's kick is a calm energy from amino acids compared to coffee's jittery high.

And matcha's leaves are ground into a water-soluble powder so you're consuming all their goodness – 70 times the antioxidant of orange juice and nine times the beta-carotene of spinach – not just the diluted run off.

Finally got your morning mouthful of a "half-caf, skinny, low foam," concoction down pat? Tea can be just as customized, especially if you experiment with water temperature and infuse time, says Takeda. For example, he takes a deep breath and spouts off, "80 C Rooibos blend, infused for one and half minutes with soymilk and a shot of lemon grass." Let's see your average barista try that.

- Carly Baillie, 24 hours