

# A new tea ritual in CdA

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With a bamboo whisk, Snezana “Snowy” Kaufmann whipped fine green powder and shot of hot water into a froth at the bottom of the cup.

Once they were well mixed, she gently poured in steamed milk, making a matcha green tea latte, one of the signature drinks at the Gaiwan Tea House in Coeur d’Alene.

Here, they call it a “latea,” emphasis on the tea part, or its name on the chalkboard menu: Snow on the Mountain.

It’s one of the top-sellers at Gaiwan Tea House, which opened last fall and offers more than 70 kinds of loose-leaf tea. Most are organic.

The goal, agreed husband-and-wife owners Snowy and Matt Kaufmann, is to offer fine teas in a relaxing environment.

“A lot of people ask us if we serve coffee, and we don’t,” Snowy Kaufmann said. “Coffee is so strong. It will overpower the more delicate tea.”

There’s no Wi-Fi, either. On purpose. “To help our customers disconnect,” she said.

Customers can choose from black, green, white, herbal, oolong, rooibos and pu-erh, a dark, aged and fermented tea from China that’s pressed into cakes and other shapes. Not sure what to get? Magnetic boards on the wall alongside the counter offer samples to smell to help customers decide.

Along with the matcha green tea “latea,” iced chai tea with a dusting of nutmeg is also a top-seller. So is London Fog, with Earl Grey tea, steamed milk and vanilla syrup – also good with lavender – and “bulletproof” matcha, with coconut oil, butter, water and a sweetener of choice. It’s popular with athletes who want an energy or fuel boost, Snowy Kaufmann said.

Tea is served in mugs made locally by Bonnie Crain Pottery and with wooden coasters made by Matt Kaufmann. A former homebuilder, he did most of the remodeling at the tea house himself.

The Kaufmanns, both 43, bought the building last spring, then got to work transforming the 110-year-old Craftsman – formerly home to an antiques store – into a cozy tea house.

Two of the rooms are named for their teenage daughters: Grace, with banana-leaf pouf seats and two low-slung tables; and Charlotte, with a table for two tucked into an alcove overlooking the yard.

The chocolate-colored Craftsman is accented by creamy posts and trim. The front door – people call in just to learn the color: Antiquity by Sherwin-Williams – is yellow. Walls inside are “greige,” or Edgecomb Gray by Benjamin Moore, to be exact.

The Kaufmanns wanted the look to be modern, not Victorian high tea.

“We wanted to keep things simple,” Matt Kaufmann said.

He met his wife while was serving as a missionary with a nondenominational Christian church in Subotica, in northern Serbia, where she was born and raised. Her nickname “Snowy” is derived from her name, made up of the words for “snow” and “woman” in Serbo-Croatian: “sneg” and “žena.”

Growing up, she said she drank Turkish coffee and chamomile tea. “Chamomile tea was for everything,” she said – headaches, colds.

After two years together in Serbia, they moved to Southern California 19 years ago, and they’ve been in Coeur d’Alene for about 12.

“We wanted a change of pace and a healthy environment for our family,” said Snowy Kaufmann.

Since moving to Coeur d’Alene, Matt Kaufmann said, his motto is: “Let it go; you’re in Idaho.”

The couple opened the tea house last October with a soft launch.

“We wanted to grow organically,” Matt Kaufmann said – through word of mouth.

The name Gaiwan comes from the Chinese word for the covered cup or lidded bowl used to serve tea in China.

Pots and cups have two price points: \$3 or \$3.75 and \$5 or \$6.75, depending on whether customers select the higher-end “emperor’s pick” tea, which is made from a more labor-intensive process.

Look for peach blossom, white guava ginger, Moroccan mint, silver tip jasmine, Earl Grey lavender, lychee pach, lapsang souchong, masala chai, and turmeric ginger, along with add-ons such as rose petals, lavender, stevia and dandelion leaf.

Pots hold 20 ounces of tea.

Whole milk or nondairy coconut, soy or almond milks are available, too.

And the back room can be rented out for meetings and small gatherings such as book clubs or baby or bridal showers. It seats about 13.

The Kaufmanns plan to add lunch items – such as hummus, chia seed pudding and quinoa salad – soon. Meantime, treats such as locally made tea-infused caramels and baked goods are available.

Tea, Snowy Kaufmann said, is warming in winter and refreshing in summer.

Either way, she said, “they’re comforting and tasty.”