

taste buds

Chef
Larry Janes



Relax with a tea break

"Tea for two and two for tea, how happy life would be."

Just when you thought all of life's problems were hard enough to handle, now comes along a food writer who wants to complicate your life with tall-tea-tales of what kind you should drink and how it should be made.

Many area hostellers and fine dining establishments are quickly learning that "High Tea" is the place to be. Whether you are planning an elaborate tea ceremony or just contemplating a simple potluck with friends, the varieties of tea are many.

It doesn't really matter if you call your tea Darjeeling, English Breakfast or Ceylon Black, all tea comes from one plant, an evergreen shrub of the camellia family which is found to thrive in tropical or subtropical climates. The abundance of tea is grown when the weather is warm and wet but tea grown in at higher, cooler altitudes, much like mountain grown coffees, is often considered the finest by tea connoisseurs.

If you have yet to visit a London Tea Shop and be swept away with aromas and flavors from the far corners of the earth, did you know that officially, there are only three kinds of tea? Yep, just black, oolong and green. Period.

It is the processing that determines the subtle differences in tea. Black tea, which accounts for almost 97 percent of the tea drunk in North America is mainly consumed in Darjeeling, Keemun and Ceylon varieties. A well-brewed black tea will have a rich, strong flavor and a mellow aroma.

Oolong teas, processed like black teas with less fermentation produce a milder brew which is rich and fruity tasting. Green teas are not fermented and the leaves are steamed, then rolled and dried which produces a light, clear and delicate but flavorful taste.

Though processing produces only three types of finished tea, there are dozens of varieties in addition to some 3,000 different blends. Everything from Earl Grey, a blend of Ceylon and Indian teas, to English breakfast, which got its moniker from the English habit of adding milk to tea to help bring out a distinctive aroma, are available to a wise tea shopper at area gourmet shops and delis.

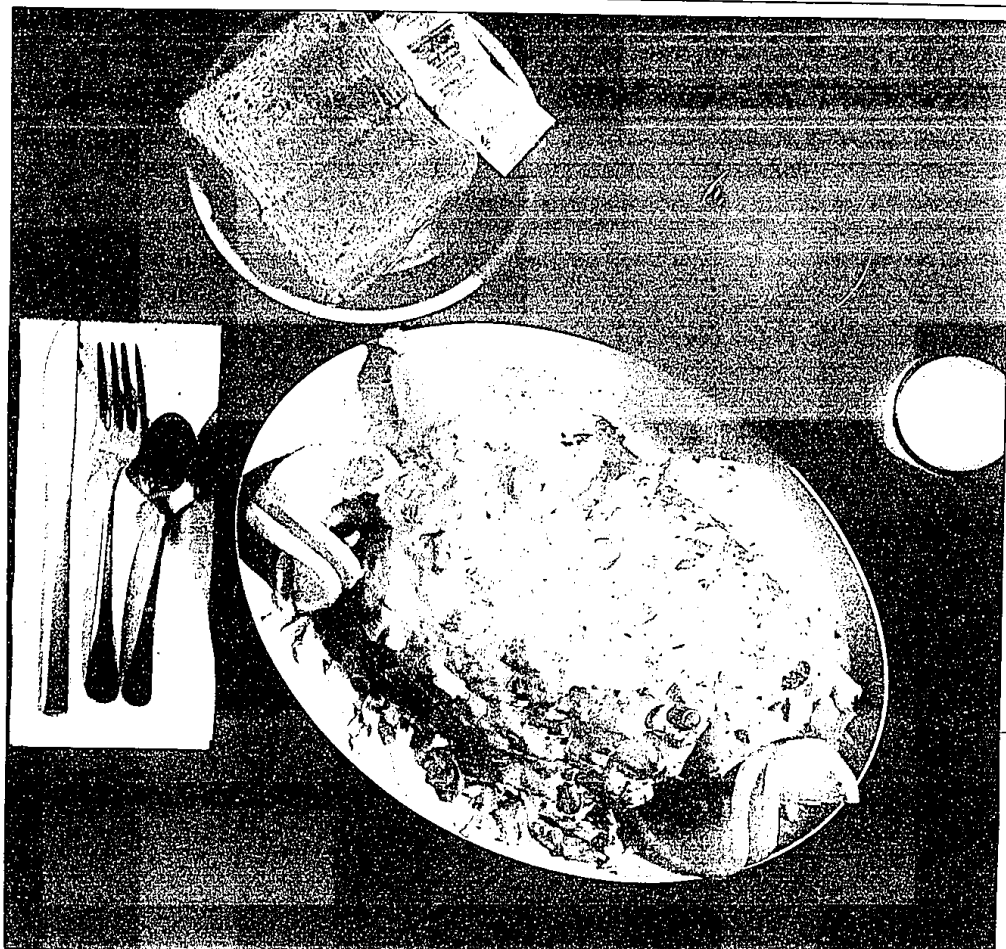
One pound of tea makes approximately 200 cups and most tinned teas last only about a year, so when you have decided on a variety worthy of investigation, be careful not to buy more than you need. Always store tea in lightproof, airtight containers at room temperature for best brewed results. By the way, herbal teas aren't really teas at all. They are a variety of dried herbs and spices.

Though all the curious tea brewing paraphernalia available could intimidate a novice, making the perfect cup of tea should not be difficult. All you need is a teapot and some fresh water.

The best teas are made in a porcelain or earthenware pot that has been warmed by filling with hot water for a few minutes. Bring fresh water to a boil (no water softened waters or well water here) and when the water boils, remove from the heat and allow the boiling to subside for a few seconds before pouring.

A rounded teaspoon of tea per six ounce cup is recommended. Bring it over the tea leaves and allow to steep for about 4-5 minutes, depending on strength. Most tea experts disdain the tea ball as the leaves are not given a chance to swell and expand. A fine mesh mini-strainer is used or, for the more daring, the loose tea is allowed to flow to the bottom of the

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DAVID FRANK/staff photographer

Redford's Geste Omelettes offers this farmer's omelette for the hearty appetite. Made with three eggs and topped with mushroom gravy, it's filled with ham, bacon, fried potatoes and onion.

Eye opener

Local restaurants offer offbeat breakfast foods

By Arlene Funke
special writer

You're going out for breakfast, but the thought of plain old eggs makes you yawn with boredom.

Well, perk up. Local restaurants are doing their best to serve up offbeat breakfast items.

An omelette with spicy chili sauce might wake up those taste buds. A "World War 2" breakfast — creamed beef over hash browns, served with bacon and eggs — might bring back memories of an earlier time.

For example, Gest Omelettes in Redford offers an omelette for just about every major ethnic variety.

"If THEY don't like ours, they can create any of their own, from the (available) ingredients," said Rose O'Dierna, who operates the small, family-run restaurant with her husband Tony.

While the O'Diernas serve plenty of the more traditional western and farmer's omelettes, they pride themselves on concocting omelettes with endless variations, using different ingredients and sauces.

For example, an Oriental omelette mixes shrimp, water chestnuts, pea pods and almonds with the eggs, then tops it off with a bernelise sauce. A "Mexican Revolution" egg dish pairs poached eggs with ranchero sauce and cheese. The "World War 2" is a Gest Omelettes creation.

"We are always interested in adding to the menu," O'Dierna said. "With this create-your-own, you can make up to 1,000 different omelettes."

According to O'Dierna, men between the ages of 25-35 are the most daring samplers of the more nonorthodox menu selections.

Gest Omelettes, tucked in a cozy building on Plymouth Road west of Beech-Daly, debuted around seven years ago with just 36 seats. It has gained a steady stream of loyal customers, and has been expanded to seat 105 hungry patrons. Mirrors make the main dining area appear larger.

"What's most popular varies from day to day," O'Dierna said. "We think we've covered every nationality."

THE RESTAURANT'S name, Gest Omelettes, is a play on words (for just). It is open from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., Saturday through Monday, and from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., Tuesday through Friday.

Casa Armando's, a family-run Mexican restaurant in Farmington Hills, was looking for a new twist when it began serving an ethnic buffet lunch weekdays, and a weekend brunch.

"We've had it six weeks now," says Joyce Galan, co-owner with her husband Armando, who was born in Texas. "It has helped (business) tremendously."

There are a lot of (Mexican) breakfasts, but none buffet style," Galan added. The restaurant, on Orchard Lake Road between 12 and 13 Mile roads, has been open since last May. The couple is in the process of selling their other restaurant of the same name, located in southwest Detroit.

ARMANDO'S EMPLOYEES cooks of Mexican heritage, who prepare a variety of items for the buffets. These dishes include eggs, mixed with tortillas, onions, tomato and green pepper; various hot sauces for the eggs; cheese enchiladas; rice and beans; and Mexican stews. Weekend brunch hours are 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

TGI Friday's, with locations in Southfield, Troy and Dearborn, attracts many young professionals with its trendy menu selections. The restaurant, part of a national chain headquartered in Dallas, was at the forefront of the craze for stuffed potato skins and Tex-Mex foods.

The restaurant serves breakfast from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., Saturday and Sunday only. It features such things as breakfast nachos — scrambled eggs over hard tortilla chips with melted cheese, and eggs with peppers, onions, and ham strips, served with soft tortilla.

"WE TAKE a cross section of what people like in the country," said a Friday's spokesman. "We get a lot of suggestions from our customers."

Other unusual breakfast items are Belgian waffles mixed with granola and Scotch eggs — hardboiled eggs which are rolled in sausage and deep-fried, served with country gravy.

While country gravy isn't widely requested in Michigan, it's "phenomenally popular" in Texas, he said.

The menu is updated once or twice a year, he said.

Easy recipes for a fast start

Nutritionists say breakfast is the most important meal of the day because it replenishes the body and gives strength and energy for tasks which lie ahead.

But some people find standard breakfast fare — eggs, cereal and toast — dull or unappetizing. Following are several recipes for quick and easy meals to spark new interest in eating breakfast.

BREAKFAST OPEN-FACED SANDWICH

4 English muffins, split and toasted
16 slices bacon, fried and drained
8 slices pineapple
8 slices Swiss cheese

SAUSAGE PIE

1 lb. bulk sausage
Dash salt and pepper
1 cup shredded mild cheddar cheese
1 cup milk
¾ cup biscuit mix
3 eggs

Heat oven to 400°. Grease 9-inch pie plate. Brown sausage, adding salt and pepper. Drain well. Spread sausage and cheese in pie plate. Mix biscuit mix, eggs and milk. Pour over sausage and cheese mixture. Bake 25-30 minutes, until top is golden brown. Cool 5 minutes before eating.

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Culinary arts salon features area chefs, aspiring students

Area chefs and culinary arts students will display their talents at the 14th Annual Hospitality Industry Culinary Arts Salon, Sunday and Monday, in Cobo Conference/Exhibition Center.

Food fanciers will have the chance to view more than 400 hors d'oeuvres, pastes, cakes and pastries created by these noted Midwest chefs and chefs-to-be. The show will run from noon to 8 p.m. both days. Admission is \$3.

Professional chefs and apprentices from the Great Lakes area, will

display over 100 platters and buffets of their finest cold food, hot food (displayed cold), and pastries. The student competition, running concurrently, will feature works by food-service students from high schools and colleges across the state.

STUDENTS FROM Oakland Community College, Schoolcraft Community College, the Livonia Public Schools, Southfield High School, Plymouth-Salem High School, the

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