

Ginseng Tea, Anyone?

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I was walking around the somewhat listless DuPont Circle in Washington, D.C., the other day and all of a sudden I thought I glimpsed a window of heaven. What is it? A rainbow of ribbons, plants, carved gourds, straw baskets, candles, books, ginseng tea, and, what's more, a little sign: "Ginseng Tea House."

Fourteen different scents of tea greeted me as I entered the gift-shop/foyer. Little potted plants and hanging china pots transformed the gift shop into something like a botanical gardens. But if I had had some money I would have bought one of the dyed and carved gourds from Peru, some of the newest acquisitions of the Ginseng Tea House.

If you can get beyond the gift shop you can either visit manager Tom Miner in his office or enter the tea house proper. Tom solved my quandary by inviting me to sit with him at one of the tea house tables.

The tale of the tea house has not been widely publicized. It was about a year ago when Michael Beard of the Washington Unification Church was asked to begin planning for a coffee house on the ground floor of the newly-acquired national headquarters building of the Unification Church on 1365 Connecticut Avenue. Michael later became involved in the home cleaning business,

so Nanette Semha [Doroski] came from the Upper Marlboro, Maryland center to coordinate the decor, equipment, and menu of the tea house. Nanette designed the interior in turn-of-the-century decor, with mock tiffany lamps, polished wooden tables, and a green, black, and white jungle wallpaper to balance the bright green walls.

But more than the design, Nanette has achieved immortality through her outstanding menu of highest quality organic foods at reasonable prices. Fruits, yogurt, avocados and sprouts can be combined in many ways to tantalize the appetite.

The first time I ate there it took me a long time to decide what to order. Finally I settled on the American Turkey sandwich platter, and everyone else at the table did too. No one was disappointed. We were served sliced turkey, alfalfa sprouts, and tomato, between slices of crunchy wheat bread. The platter also contained a large square of gouda cheese and a three-bean salad. With a cup of ginseng tea and a bowl of my all time favorite dessert, orange milk soup, I thought I had found the kingdom of heaven.

Six fruit-and-yogurt drinks and three varieties of teas lead the menu selection. But according to Tom and the waitresses, the sandwiches get the raves, with the San Joaquin receiving the most votes. It packs between two slices of bread some avocado, watercress, mushrooms, tomatoes, and two layers of cream cheese. Few people are still hungry after one of these.

"Everyone who tastes these sandwiches falls in love with them," Michael Beard announced as he walked into the tea house. "My brother came here and said, "This is fantastic. If there was a place like this near where I live I would come every day."

Soon there will be a second and larger tea house, somewhere in the Georgetown area, with the eventual goal of opening four in the Washington area. In addition to its present sandwich menu, Tom Miner is adding breakfast and dinner items, and a carry-out service.

On opening day last fall, Washingtonians were curious about ginseng tea. What was it? What does it do? Now the tea house serves a regular clientele who are really convinced about the value of ginseng, the root which for 5,000 years has been believed by Chinese and other Orientals to have wonderful powers to

maintain or restore the optimum functioning of the physical body. The ginseng tea sold at the tea house is imported from the Hwa Pharmaceutical Company in Seoul, Korea in bottles of instant granules.

The staff of the Ginseng Tea House believes wholeheartedly in the spiritual value of their ginseng tea, and Michael Beard believes that "ginseng tea can be instrumental in the spiritual and physical restoration of mankind." Their customers return regularly to replenish their ginseng supply.

Large glass crocks display ten varieties of tea leaves, the bestselling line of the gift shop. It's hard to find any scents lovelier than the cinnamon tea and the mu tea, which sells faster than any other kind. Boxes and bottles of other teas expand the variety of available teas, but Tom expects to greatly expand his tea selection and also sell accessories, such as tea pots and tea cups.

"People are drawn in by the window displays," Tom explained. And hostess Lynn Nessa, who had spent two days arranging the current window contents, beamed. Other staff members also take their turns doing the windows. "Sometimes I think the atmosphere is almost narcotic," Tom continued. People come back regularly. Last week a man told me, 'We will be back here because my friend loved the people that served here, not just the food.'"

The tea house staff does not view their work as just another job. They work long hours to do all the food preparation and clean-up, as well as the actual arranging and serving of food. The present staff of ten handles all aspects of the gift shop and tea house, which serves lunch from 11:30 to 2:30 and dinner from 4:00 to 9:30. The previous week they had grossed an average of \$350 per day, the highest average so far.

After several months in the formation stages the tea house is building a tight-knit staff and an efficient working system. The staff lives with the local Unification Church, although in the past they had lived in an apartment on the top floor of their building.

Tom comes from a business-minded family-his father is in the retail business. He studied business administration at Iowa State University and read business books constantly while in the service. He first met the Unification Church in Berkeley, California, and joined in February, 1973 in Denver, Colorado. Since then he has worked on various business projects.

"The Ginseng Tea House staff as a group of people has the same problems as the first One World Crusade team or the first Mobile Fund-raising team -- creating a new pattern," Tom observed. He often compared the mission of the tea house staff to that of the mobile fund-raising teams. "I as a leader have to help our staff grow spiritually and witness to Christ. But also we want to expand our work in the business community in a professional sense, developing a consistent pattern." In addition to their long hours of work, the staff maintains a daily pattern of prayer and study.

The Ginseng Tea House opened its doors on September 12, 1973, under the management of Russ Walters and Nanette Semha, but closed down in October for the Washington Day of Hope campaign. Steve Conlon and a new staff operated the tea house from October 31 until December 22. Tom Miner left the Day of Hope mobile staff on January 3 to take over the management of the tea house and expand it to the entire ground floor of the Unification center. Redecorated and restyled with a gift shop, the tea house reopened on January 23, 1974.

A variety of entertainment was added occasionally to the tea house schedule, notably the 11-week Cooperative Consciousness series featuring noted spiritual leaders in the Washington area. One of Tom's concerns, however, was that the people who attended such programs as the Cooperative Consciousness series were not the regular clientele of the restaurant.

"Our facility is more entertainment-oriented," he explained, "so we want to use it that way. We want to feature individual and small-group entertainment on Friday nights. Several persons have expressed interest in doing a summer stock spiritual theatre on Saturdays at the tea house, which we feel excited about coordinating. We are contacting a professional story-teller for Wednesday nights-to tell stories from Hesse, Gibran, etc., featuring themes like man's search for God." At lunch they are inviting artists to come in and do pottery, leather work, etc. Business contacts of the Unification Church often come to the tea house for meals, in addition to the variety of regular customers.

One 65-year-old lady comes in every day for her candy bar, and several people a day order carryout Ginseng tea. As I exited, I noticed two old friends who hadn't seen each other for a while. The tea house is great for "chance" reunions like that. Finally I waved a fond farewell to the Ginseng Tea House from my car window.