

NEW CHEESE+ ANNUAL

the word on cheese

# culture

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## 193 PERFECT PAIRINGS

CRAFT CIDERS **SOUP BEERS** SPICED NUTS **BACON JAMS** AND MORE p. 15

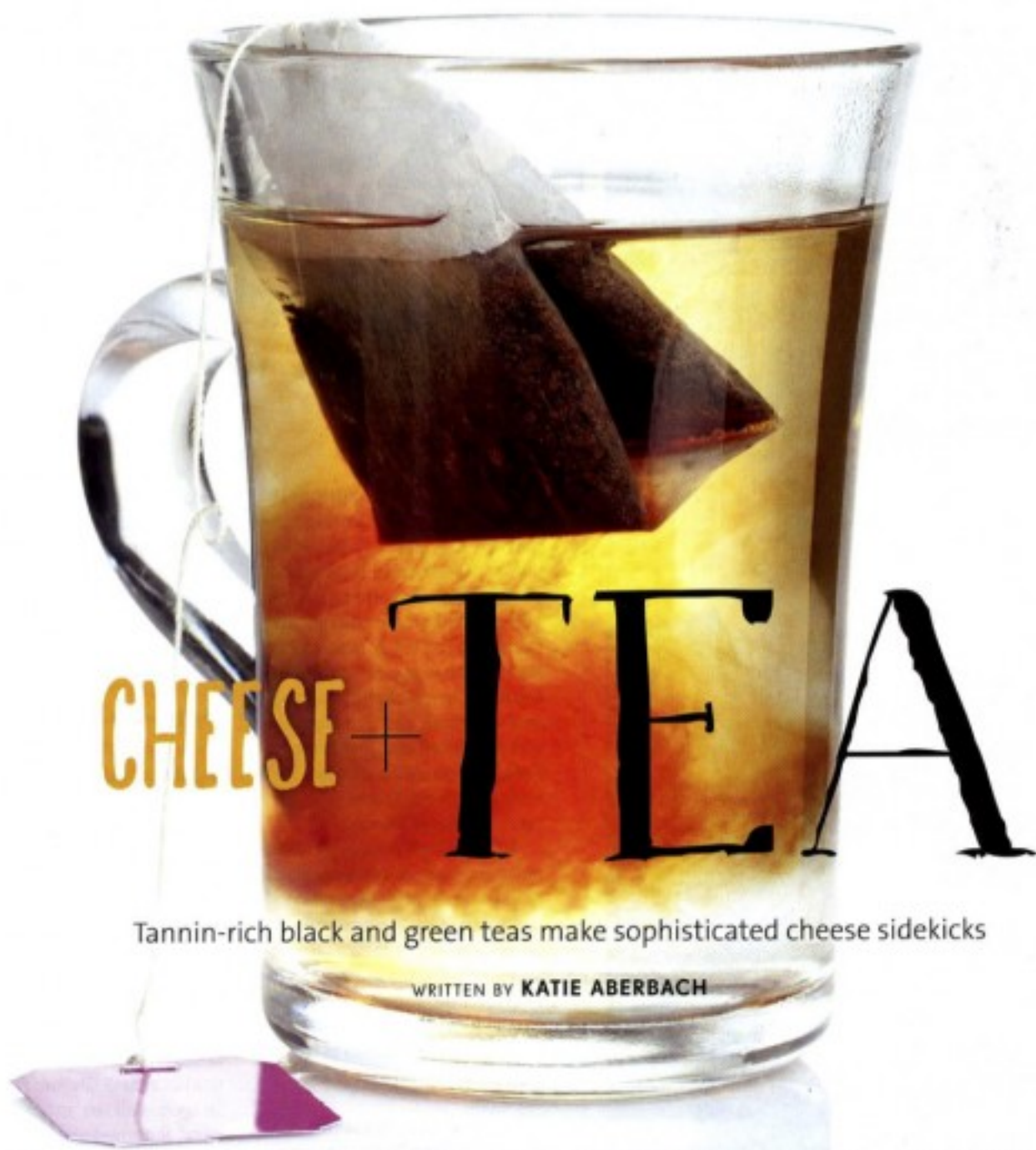


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# CHEESE + TEA

Tannin-rich black and green teas make sophisticated cheese sidekicks

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**A** slice of cheese and a spot of tea: Probably not your first thought when you hear “pairing.” But there are plenty of reasons to get to know these unlikely bedfellows. For starters, both are products of fermentation (though in the context of tea, “fermentation” refers to oxidation rather than microbial activity).

“As soon as you break tea leaves [during harvest], fermentation begins,” says Lukas Marcinowski, food and beverage manager and tea expert at the Park Hyatt in Washington, D.C. Tearing the leaves triggers an enzymatic transformation in which they begin to wither and deepen in flavor and color. Depending on the style of tea being made, leaves may then be rolled or pressed, lightly bruised, pan-fired, or all of the above, and then dried, before the resulting tea is graded by size and distributed to customers.

What’s more, certain tea leaves contain tannins, the same bitter plant compounds that give wine its astringent, full-bodied taste (essentially helping it marry so well with cheese). Many varieties of black and green teas contain high amounts of tannins, so those styles are the focus here. Once dried tea leaves are exposed to hot water, they release tannins, contributing to that particular brew’s distinctive flavor. Thank tannins for tea’s deep hues and slightly sharp, savory edge.



When it comes to pairings, "I always search for a bridge in flavors," says Betty Koster, co-owner of Netherland's L'Amuse cheese shop who often gives tea and cheese pairing demos. "You can smell the tea at first; try to identify what you recognize. For example, in pu-her [green] tea, you will smell earthy notes, like a wet autumn forest and moss." Seek a cheese with similar characteristics, Koster says, such as Brie de Meaux.

While complementary cheese and tea power couples are many, the contrasts between the two can be striking, particularly when it comes to temperature—and you'll always want opposites to attract on this point. Cheese should be served at room temperature, while tea is best either hot or cold, never in between.

"Hot tea tends to make a rich cheese feel less heavy because it washes away some of the cheese's palate-coating texture," says Republic of Tea's Kristina Richens. "You get a clash of temperatures, which, to me, not only feels great in the mouth but also great in the stomach."

### Strong Contrasts

Contrasting qualities are immediately apparent between strong black teas and rich triple crèmes, making them fail-safe pairings for beginners. The crispness and astringency of

these full-bodied teas cut through smooth-textured, extra-buttery cheeses and coat the palate with a long, soothing finish. Triple crèmes can also mellow sharp notes and draw out any subtle floral characteristics in the tea.

**Joan of Arc Triple Crème Brie + Mighty Leaf Tea Organic Breakfast**

**Fromager D'Affinois Guilloteau + Republic of Tea Earl Greyer**

**Castello Danish Blue + Tazo Organic Earl Grey**

**Bucheron + Rare Tea Cellar First Flush Darjeeling**

### Earthy

It makes sense that earthy green teas would pair well with cheeses containing herbal and grassy notes (even if their terroirs are worlds apart). China's famous Dragon Well tea, made with hand-flattened green leaves to lend mellow flavor, complements the herbaceous characteristic and smooth texture of alpine-style cheeses. Japanese-style green teas containing toasted rice and popcorn offer distinctive nutty tones that heighten the sharp flavor of crumbly aged cheddar.

**Le Gruyère AOC + Rishi Tea Organic Dragon Well Green Tea**

**Cabot Clothbound Cheddar + Teapigs Popcorn Tea**

**Shelburne Farms 3-Year-Aged Cheddar + Numi Organic Toasted Rice Tea**