

DRINK

High tea takes a liking to the high life

By LAURA REPSTAD

Mark Ukra knew nothing about teas or tonics when he bought the Tea Garden & Herbal Emporium a year ago. However, his wife was Gallerie Michael owner Julie Ukra; he knew a thing or two about collecting.

The result? A selection of rare and aged teas, some of which cost more than an iPod Nano.

The 1952 Guang Yun Gong Bin, a digestive Pu-erh tea, retails for \$490 an ounce. A pot of Purple Lady, an organic green tea the color of a ripe plum, goes for \$40.

"It's been a destination for people for more than a decade, but you had to hear about it by word of mouth," says George Lamoureux, a Tea Garden herbalist for 13 years. "It was not the kind of place you just walk into."

Ron Teeguarden, credited as one of the world's foremost herbalists, opened the shop in 1988 with the goal of introducing herbal tonics to mainstream America.

Loyalists had no problem with the dark, cramped and musty shop on Beverly Boulevard, but it didn't draw much foot traffic from the Robertson Boulevard shopping corridor. (Teeguarden left in 1996 and later opened Dragon Herbs Emporium in Santa Monica.)

"If you saw what it looked like then, most people would run," says Ukra. "As did most people."

To change that, the Ukra's brought in a feng shui master, expanded the shop and its inventory and, in a tribute to the Dalai Lama, decorated in a bright orange meant to mimic the exact shade of his robes.

Lamoureux and his herbalists now work behind a polished wood bar as they mix formulas like Goddess Tonic, where herbs like lady maku, shen drops, super deer antler and super chen "reveal the drinker's inner goddess" and "promote warmth, beauty and eternal youth" — a great sales pitch for the Botox set.



Among the items for sale at Tea Garden: organic toiletries from Bali and a \$5,000 teapot. At right: owner Mark Ukra and herbalist George Lamoureux

Ukra's next task is reviving the "Stones Chiew," a tonic that the Rolling Stones asked Teeguarden to make for their 1989 tour. The desired effects: good chi, stamina and sexual energy.

Ukra inherited the secret recipe — but he can't sell the herbal brandy unless the Tea Garden gets a liquor license.



Earl Grey? How retro. *Variety Weekend* asked three WeHo teahouses for a pot or two of their finest.

TEA GARDEN & HERBAL EMPORIUM
9001 Beverly Blvd. (310) 205-0104

Purple Lady (\$115/oz., \$40/pot)

This extremely rare green tea grows in a Chinese riverbed where pH balance turns the plant purple. Sweet-smelling, with a chestnutty flavor. U.S. exclusive to Tea Garden.

Coffee Tea (\$16/oz., \$10/pot)

Oolong tea roasted like a coffee bean, Tea Garden created it for those trying to get off the java. First steep is convincing, gives full aroma and nutty flavor of a cup of coffee.

ELIXIR TONICS AND TEAS

8612 Melrose Ave. (877) 4-ELIXIR

Rooibos Darling (\$3.50/oz. or pot)

Created from a South African red bark and flavored with chocolate, it tastes like figs.

Black Vanilla Rose (\$3/oz. or pot)

Black tea mixed with dried roses and vanilla essence. Smells like roses; tastes like vanilla.

CHADO TEA ROOM

8422 ½ W. 3rd St. (800) 442-4109

Casablanca (\$2.18 oz., \$2.75 pot)

Touted as "green tea gets lovestruck by Moroccan mint and bergamot." Smells, tastes clean; strong mint notes and subtler florals. Crisp aftertaste leaves mouth tingling.

Exotique (\$1.67 oz., \$2.75 pot)

Ceylon tea mixed with dried passion fruits, red fruits and rose petals creates an intoxicating tropical aroma. Sweet at first sip, but a bitter aftertaste lingers.

—L.R.