



The fussy eater

Ariel Leve

I'm not looking for enlightenment in a packet. Why won't they just let me have a simple cup of tea?

How many blends of tea can there be? It's not just the variety that's overwhelming, but the aggressive self-empowering messages that come on the packaging. There are proverbs and advice and information; not only will I have a cup of tea, but I'll learn some random detail about ancient China. The possibilities for enlightenment have become limitless.

When will it get to a point where someone says: enough already? Even ice cream drew a line in the sand when Baskin-Robbins declared 31 flavours. Their attitude was: if you can't find something you like with 31 flavours, you shouldn't be having ice cream. I would mandate the same rigour with tea.

At Whole Foods there are teas "sourced" from all over the world. Black teas, white teas, green teas and herbal infusions. Then within those categories there are subcategories: chai, organic, decaff. Spicy, soothing, smoothing, fruity or bold. There are medicinal teas that offer everything from cleansing your liver to detoxing your bowels to boosting your immune system and stimulating your sex drive.



Then there is a tea to calm down from all the activity. There are teas to put you to sleep, teas wake you up; it is all so confusing. It could give you a panic attack. Naturally, there is a tea for that.

Here's what there wasn't: a tea to do my work for me. Or to clean my apartment. Now that's a tea I'd drink.

Another tea that's missing? A tea to help me make a decision. For an indecisive person, the tea aisle has become the stressful environment you seek relief from.

And, perhaps most off-putting, there is an entire selection just for women. All of these teas have to do with aches and pains, bloating, stress and mood swings. Sorry, men don't feel irritable?

New York has woken up to tea but it's become an ordeal. If you're going

out, ordering requires an advanced degree, an unlimited expense account, and hours to spare.

Why? Because tea menus are the size of the Magna Carta and the waiters are like sommeliers. Recently, I went to a tea salon and the waiter described attributes of the tea, as though it were human. It had "boldness, depth and character". It was blended in a rainforest and the aroma was both "smoky and fruity". There was a lot going on in that tea. By the time he was done talking, I was worn out.

He paused. "Maybe you'd prefer something invigorating, rejuvenating or refreshing?"

"Is there a difference?" I asked.

He gave me the kind of look you give an amateur. I wish I could remember what exactly was rejuvenating about the tea but as soon as I heard the word "passion" I stopped listening.

I ordered organic Darjeeling. When the bill came, I thought there had been a mistake. For what they were charging, the tea should have been made from diamonds. Don't these people remember that historically the price of tea caused all sorts of problems?

For a less refined experience, there is a new chain of shiny tea cafes with a menu board that displays photos of the tea drink and sexy descriptions. The Mojitea. The Teapuccino. The Red Velvet. Red Velvet tea? Yup. Red tea, raspberry and white chocolate.

"It's like drinking a cupcake!" the woman behind the counter chirped.

I asked for a cup of coffee. **OFM** ariel.leve@observer.co.uk

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KITCHEN APPS

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MasterChef Academy UK

What is it? A social media side dish to accompany nightly instalments of

MasterChef. Plus your chance to enjoy John and Gregg's tips, praise, slurs, and "mmms" on your phone for just £2.99.

Key ingredients Comes with 9 master classes in basic kitchen skills, covering meat, eggs, seafood, fruit and veg and so on. Each has advice and videos on prepping and cooking

for all abilities. Plus there are 50 not-at-all-bad recipes.

Let's get personal There's even an area to put all your best videos and recipes, so you can find them again easily.

So it's genuinely useful? Yes, though an iPad version would improve it. Following a "How to make Hollandaise" video on something as small as a smartphone may prove a little too challenging.

Will it make me a master chef? Unlikely. But it does give a decent grounding in basics you might be too embarrassed to ask about.

THE PIE CHART

The month in food, at a glance: how much insect the US FDA allows in food

