

Fresh twist for tea leaves

French chef Laurent Loudeac tells Jono Galuszka why tea gastronomy is the next big thing in food.

THE FRENCH are usually associated with wine, but one French chef is taking inspiration from the most English of beverages – tea. Hippopotamus Restaurant executive chef Laurent Loudeac is embracing tea as a cooking ingredient after studying at Dilmah's School of Tea in Sri Lanka.

The trip consisted of intensive schooling in the science of tea, tea gastronomy (how tea and food goes together) and mixology (how tea is used in drinks).

While Hippopotamus has been serving English high teas for the last two years, Loudeac had never thought about pairing food and tea before his trip.

"It was a bit of an eye-opener for me – I'm not a big tea drinker," he says.

"All I knew before was that people were doing tea-smoked fish or duck breast."

"For me, it's now all about the flavour, how you can match tea with food."

While Loudeac concedes New Zealanders are more likely to pick up a glass of wine with dinner, he can see tea becoming a culinary trend.

"It's becoming more progressive – like food and beer at the moment."

A lack of appreciation for tea is the reason why people have not used it in cooking until now, he says.

"There's a lot more behind tea."

After visiting Sri Lanka, Loudeac rewrote the dinner menu at Hippopotamus to include two tea-based dishes: duck breast marinated in a sweet Prince of Kandy tea and a



Refreshing idea: A tea-inspired cocktail, the Silly Old Bear. Photos: MAARTEN HOLL

green tea creme brulee.

For people wanting to attempt tea gastronomy at home, he recommends tasting teas before including them in a dish.

"You have to use a tea that you like," he says. "Try the tea, and then it is [about] personal taste. Think about what would go with that tea."

"I know food better than tea so, after I try a tea, I can think 'oh, that's the flavour. It could go with so-and-so food'."

While his duck dish includes tea, Loudeac says tea is better suited to desserts.

"Use the tea to flavour a creme brulee or to marinate fruit and turn it into a cake. Then you can serve the



Laurent Loudeac: Learned about tea in Sri Lanka.

same tea with the dessert."

But ultimately it is all down to experimentation, he says.

"It's the Kiwi way – try it and see if it works."

PRINCE OF KANDY MARINATED DUCK BREAST CARPACCIO, WITH MANDARIN TEA JELLY, TEA SYRUP AND CHAMOMILE FLOWERS

2 duck breasts, skin on

MARINADE

6 tsp Prince of Kandy looseleaf tea
250ml hot water
30g manuka honey
juice of one lemon

Mix all ingredients together and let infuse for five minutes, then strain and reserve.

Sear the duck breasts in a heavy pan over high heat, skin side down, until the fat has melted. Flip over and cook for 3-4 minutes, then remove from the heat.

Place the duck breasts in a container and pour the infused tea over the top.

Let cool, then cover and refrigerate for 24 hours, turning once.

MANDARIN TEA JELLY

3 Mediterranean Mandarin teabags
300ml hot water
juice of one orange
2 tsp sugar
3 leaves of gelatine, softened

Put the teabags into the hot water and let infuse for three minutes. Add the orange juice and sugar, then strain through a fine sieve.

Add the gelatine and stir until dissolved, then pour into a container (you want the jelly to be 3cm deep). Cover and refrigerate until set.



Tea time: The duck breast marinated in a sweet Prince of Kandy tea. Photo: MAARTEN HOLL

TEA SYRUP

3 tsp Prince of Kandy looseleaf tea
300ml hot water
150g white sugar

Put all ingredients into a small saucepan and let infuse for five minutes. Pass through a fine sieve, then return to the saucepan and cook over gentle heat to reduce slightly to a syrupy consistency. Cool before using.

GARNISH

Handful of micro salad leaves
Orange zest and segments
chamomile flowers

Drain and dry the duck breast. Slice finely and put 10-12 slices in the middle of a plate so they overlap. Season lightly with salt and pepper.

Mix the micro salad leaves with the orange zest and segments and pile on top of the duck breast. Chop the jelly into small cubes and arrange around the plate. Drizzle the duck and salad with syrup, then sprinkle over a few chamomile flowers. Drizzle the duck with lemon juice before serving. Serves two as a main course.

DILMAH JASMINE GREEN TEA CREME BRULEE

500ml cream
4 yolks
1 whole egg
80g sugar
2 Tbsp Jasmine green tea

Add the tea to the cold cream and let infuse for two to three hours.

Pour into a pot and bring to the boil. Meanwhile, whisk the whole egg, the yolks and the sugar together in a large bowl. Slowly pour the cream over the egg mixture, beating constantly to avoid the egg curdling. Pour through a fine sieve and skim off the froth.

Put four ramekins into a roasting dish and pour in enough hot water to come halfway up their sides. Pour the cream mixture into the ramekins, then cover the whole dish with tinfoil and bake at 145 degrees Celsius fanbake for about 20-25 minutes. The creme brulees should be wobbly when shaken gently.

Sprinkle caster sugar on top before serving and caramelize with a blow torch until you get a nice crust. Serves four.

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