

Tea sommelier
Jennifer Commins



A new take on tea

Commins said she is working with Eric Woods, of The Beverley Hotel, to “push the tea envelope a bit.” Commins told *ORN* that while coffee has seen a revolution in quality, customers are hesitant to order tea because their experiences haven’t been particularly inspiring.

Crafted tea blends can be more expensive—about 40 cents compared to a couple of cents per bag—but Commins noted foodservice operators can

charge between \$4 and \$8 for a formal tea service. People will pay that much, she added, “if they know it’s done properly.” Commins said tea could complement any style of cuisine. For a Thai restaurant, she suggested a flower petal and jasmine green, for example.

The self-described “entrepreneur by nature” studied cuisines of interest at George Brown College and completed the tea sommelier program there before getting her business underway. She noted that Toronto has

an “amazing restaurant culture. Why can’t tea catch up a bit?” She pointed out that tea is often the last experience a diner encounters, which could leave a lasting impression.

Commins looks for local ingredients and suppliers for ingredients as well as local areas for inspiration. Her Spadina Avenue Blend, a black tea, is inspired by Chinatown. She describes it as a fruit-forward lychee blend featuring the flavours of mango, lime, lemongrass and coconut. Prince Edward Lavender was Commins’ first terroir tea created for the Eastern Ontario county’s Terroir Run event in May and was served over ice at the finish line.

Commins noted tea can be used not only for drinking, but also can be ground and used to flavour dishes. She suggests using Lapsang Souchong, a smoky flavoured, spring-plucked tea, in shortbread cookies or barbecue sauce. “I want to make tea accessible and modern and do it in the most sustainable way possible,” said Commins.

Commins’ tips for the perfect cup can be found at www.ontariorestaurantnews.com.

TORONTO—Tea sommelier Jennifer Commins wants to give tea its just desserts by bringing out local flavours and influences with bespoke blends through her Toronto-based Pluck Tea.

In mid-September, the Shangri-La Hotel Toronto rolled out a six-tea menu, complete with dessert pairings.

Since launching in February, Commins has built a notable list of foodservice clients, including Nota Bene, the Soho House, Mark McEwan and Jamie Kennedy.