

Yixing Collectable Teapots

The History of Tea.

It is thought that the Hunan region of China is the origin of the tea plant. Indeed, according to the Chinese legend, tea (or Chá) was discovered in China around 5000 years ago. The early Chinese Emperor Shen Nong, a renowned scientist, had decreed that for health reasons, all water should be boiled before consumption. It was while travelling, that leaves from a nearby plant fell into the boiling water. Curious, Shen Nong drank the unknown beverage, finding it refreshing. Tea was born and soon became popular throughout China, particularly in the southern regions around Fuzhou and Canton (now Guangzhou).

Tea soon became a trade item and travelled east into Korea and then Japan, eventually becoming an integral part of the culture throughout Asia. Tea was carried west by camel train along the trade route to India, Arabia and the Mediterranean. The discovery of tea also led to the development of vessels or pots designed to enhance what had become in some regions a highly ritualised activity. The humble teapot was born and the search began for the ideal vessel from which to serve the beverage.

The Zisha Clay Pot

Today, Yixing is renowned across China as the centre for fine teapots. The choice of Yixing was no accident. The popularity of Yixing teapots dates back to the discovery in the Sung Dynasty (960 - 1279) of Zisha clay. Zisha (Zi=purple and Sha= Sand) clay is not ordinary sandy clay. Neither is it a purple colour, although some deposits do have a slight purple tinge. Known as the five-colour clay, it is a mixture of clay, quartz and mica, contains a high amount of iron, but contains no lead, arsenic, cadmium or other toxic chemicals often found in other clay deposits.

The unique chemical composition and texture of Zisha clay allows about 4% absorption of the tea as it brews and this makes the clay ideally suited for making tea pots. Yixing tea pots are the best tea brewing vessels as they can preserve the heat, colour and taste of the tea. They are also special because they are resistant to cracking even under extreme temperature differences.

Caring for Your Yixing Teapot

The maturing nature of Zisha clay means that the best brewing is achieved when the pot is not scrubbed clean, but rinsed out lightly to remove the old leaves. Some staining will occur on the outside of the pot. Do not attempt to remove it as it is believed to give the pot a character of its own. The build up of tea residue in the pot can block the small straining holes for pouring. Gently relieving the holes with a fine wooden skewer is the only cleaning that should be carried out regularly.

Because the teapot will absorb the flavour of the tea as it draws, your pot should only ever be used to brew the same style of oolong tea. With so many flavours of tea popular in China, collecting Yixing teapots became a matter of necessity, in order to maintain the flavour in each pot. The most popular oolong teas are Jasmine and Ti Kwan Yin (Iron Buddha Tea), although there are many more. Your local Tea Shop will be able to provide you with advice on the many different styles of oolong tea.

Finally, Chinese legend has it that given sufficient time, the pot will hold so much of the flavour of the tea, that adding boiling water is all that's needed to draw the flavour of the tea.

The Focus on Yixing Teapots

In China, Yixing has become the centre for excellence in the manufacture of teapots and the home for some of China's finest pottery masters. The nature of the clay and the low shrinkage rate, allows the potter to produce a quality pot with excellent sealing characteristics. Because of the quality being produced, Yixing teapots have developed a reputation as works of art. The master potters place great pride in producing works of art with true aesthetic features and Yixing teapots have become collectables the world over.

There are three forms of teapot craft within our range. The first (Group 1), is the hand-crafted pot of the master potters. Each component of the pot is carefully and meticulously crafted by hand, without the use of moulds. These are very rare and expensive. A single design may be produced at the rate of only one pot per month.

The second (Group 2), is the hand-moulded pot, where the individual components are created by hand using outside moulds. The final components are joined together and finished by hand. These can be produced quickly, but because of the hands on nature, are limited in number. Finally (group 3), is the poured mould, where the individual components of the pot are poured in moulds and assembled by hand. This method allows for increased production. The hand-finished nature does limit the quantity, but assures the quality of the finished item.

There are thousands of different designs available in Yixing teapots. Each is unique in style and character, making an ideal addition to any collection. We hope you enjoy building your collection as much as we enjoy bringing them to you.

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