

BEV NEXT

A rare find in RTD teas

Inko's White Tea offers a new taste in the iced tea market

This summer, green is out and white is in—at least for iced tea. With a unique flavor devoid of the “grassy” aftertaste of green tea and more purported cancer-fighting properties, Inko's White Tea offers health-conscious consumers and tea lovers a rare find.

Inko's White Tea, from Inko's LLC (New York, NY, USA) hit select gourmet and health stores in February and is continuing its roll-out across the New York tri-state area in grocery stores, restaurants, spas and movie houses. Using the slogan “Rare Tea, Rare Taste, Rare Find,” Inko's prides itself on the fact that it is the first company to singularly produce a ready-to-drink white tea.

“White tea is the rarest tea in the world,” says Alex Reist, director of public relations for Inko's. “True white tea is only grown in China's Fujian province.”

Getting its name from the fine, silvery white hairs covering unopened tea plant buds, white tea is made from the bud of the tea plant rather than the leaves. The tea is made by brewing steamed and dried buds rather than the concentrate or powder form used to make other tea varieties. Some studies have shown that white tea contains more antioxidants because it is the least processed of any teas.

Two years ago, Andrew Schamisso, founder and president of Inko's, got the idea for the beverage from a home recipe used by his wife. After finding white tea in Manhattan's Chinatown, Cecile Schamisso used an old family recipe to mix ginger with the white tea to make a drink that was clean and crisp.

Schamisso was initially motivated to market the tea drink because of its distinctly light and sweet flavor without the “grassy” aftertaste associated with green tea.

“I don't normally crave anything and I craved this,” he says.

Thanks to its unique formula, Schamisso claims that Inko's is not only the sweetest-tasting low-calorie drink on the market, but that it also maintains a unique flavor that curiously changes and gets better with each sip.

Made with fructose crystals rather than corn syrup, Inko's White Tea has only 28 calories per serving.

According to Schamisso, taste was his inspiration for marketing a white tea—the health benefits were a bonus. It was only after researching white tea on the Internet that Schamisso says he became aware of the potential health benefits of an RTD white tea.

“Even though specific studies concerning white tea are in their infancy the fact is promising research is currently being conducted that indicates white tea may be a better cancer fighter than any other tea on the market,” Schamisso says. “I'm not a beverage guy, but it started to click. There's a need for this and it's got great potential health-wise and just tastes so amazing.”

To further its healthy image, Inko's also will donate a portion of the proceeds from every bottle of Inko's White Tea to cancer research.

True to the homespun origins of the white tea drink, Schamisso decided to name the drink and the company after his dog—possibly the world's first Chief Doggie Officer, or CDO.

“Basically, Inko exemplifies the qualities we, as a company, strive to bring to our customers: loyalty, love, devotion and a stubborn drive to make you smile (after every sip of course),” he says.

Inko's White Tea is available in 16-ounce glass bottles in Northeast and New England markets. Schamisso says he wants to capture the Northeast segment and then move the beverage to California before slowly expanding nationally.

Reist says Inko's White Tea appeals to health-conscious consumers, baby boomers and tea connoisseurs who may not be familiar with white tea but are aware of the health benefits of green tea.

“We're hoping to educate people about what white tea is,” he says.

Because of its exotic origins, white tea is generally more expensive. Schamisso says the company works with importers to bring the highest quality white tea from China. A bottle of Inko's White Tea generally retails for \$2—a premium price point.

With the growth in the alternative and healthy beverage segment, Schamisso says he believes there is room for a niche drink like Inko's.

“I absolutely believe white tea is where green tea was in 1998 when it exploded on the scene. Five years later (green tea) has double-digit growth and I can foresee that happening for another five years because, according to research, only 20 percent of the population has tried it,” he says. “So, there is tremendous room for growth. White tea on its face is healthier for you and it tastes better because it goes down clean and crisp.” —By Heather Todd



Inko's healthy white tea boasts a high level of antioxidants and a unique ginger flavor.

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