

Inko's White Tea

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WHEN ANDY SCHAMISSO and Alex Reist launched Inko's White Tea, their first bit of press came from *Stuff* magazine, which described their product as something along the lines of "the first tea for white people."

"It was so funny," chuckles 28-year-old Reist, Inko's public relations director, whose appreciation for this type of humor doesn't have as much to do with his age as it does with his previous employers. He and Schamisso, Inko's president and CEO, defected from a boutique p.r. firm that represents Dennis Publishing, home of *Maxim*, *Blender* and *Stuff*. Now the two produce and market all-natural bottled iced white tea made from the silvery white buds of the tea plant rather than the leaves, the source of black and green teas.

Taking in the last bit of sun at an Upper West Side brewery, Schamisso and Reist have retained some of their lad-mag aura. Both clad in t-shirts and sunglasses, Schamisso steadily nurses a draft beer and sucks down the occasional cigarette, while the spiky-haired Reist edgily checks his cellphone every few minutes.

Outward signs notwithstanding, the two have taken a less macho turn since striking out on their own. In addition to running his company, Schamisso, 41, is a stay-at-home dad. Each day from seven to three, he tends to his nine-month-old daughter at their Upper East Side apartment while his wife works at an area hospital. When she returns, Schamisso starts his day—visiting his mother at the hospital, maintaining his accounts and visiting the New Jersey warehouse where his teas are stored. As for Reist, he moved back in with his mother after joining the company.

Schamisso was inspired to start Inko's (named after his Lhasa apso, pictured on the

concoction made by his wife, which turned out to be iced white tea. "I don't crave anything, maybe sometimes a beer after work," says Schamisso. "But I was craving this." After doing some research, Schamisso learned that white tea, the least processed of teas, contains more antioxidants than green tea as well as purported cancer-fighting agents. (A percentage of all of Inko's sales goes toward cancer research.) White tea is milder and naturally sweeter than green tea—it has fewer tannins, which means a smoother taste—and has a pale, warm hue.

When Schamisso discovered that there was no one company devoted exclusively to making white tea, he decided to become the first. Inko's tea is refreshing, only mildly sweetened and comes in unusual, well-executed flavors such as blueberry, honeydew and white peach.

Although Inko's has amassed a devoted following since launching its first product, the original white tea, in April 2003, Schamisso hasn't seen a paycheck in three years. But momentum appears to be gathering, and in March alone Inko's earned 80 percent of last year's revenues. In April they hope to top that. For now, Inko's is available in 25 states and at several stores including Fairway, Gristedes, Citarella, Whole Foods and Grace's Market in the city.

"We're not having delusions of grandeur or anything," adds Schamisso. "We don't think that we're going to be buying our own boats and mansions."

"We don't?" Reist shoots back. "Hell, I just want to move out of my mother's house." □