

## ALL ABOUT THE HIDDEN WORLD OF PU'ER TEA WITH TEASPEC



## BORN TO BE A BREW

Grown in the hills of Southern Yunnan, China, for centuries and named for the city where it was traded, Pu'er tea is - well, was - a relatively functional drink. It was valued mainly for its curative qualities and popular in Hong Kong, southern China and Tibet for cutting through heavy meals. All this changed some twenty years ago when tea aficionados cottoned on that - like whisky and wine - Pu'er acquired an incredible complexity when aged. Prices skyrocketed to astronomical figures, with the highest so far recorded in 2013 where a bundle of 2,083g of Pu'er tea from the 1900s fetched US\$1.5 million (RM6.45 million) at auction.

The aging process is key to creating the elegant flavours and sensations Pu'er is prized for, and tea connoisseurs now recognise Malaysia as having the most ideal conditions in the world to store Pu'er. Carole Tan's mother-in-law discovered this first hand, being a collector of Pu'er since the late 70's and her large and precious tea collection became the catalyst of Teaspec, a boutique tea company geared towards introducing tea enthusiasts to Pu'er.



Established in 2015, Teaspec is a certified supplier and dedicated wholesaler of Yunnan Xiaguan Tuocha in South East Asia and the United Kingdom. Being collectors rather than commercial tea merchants have afforded them total access to the oldest and most reputable Pu'er producer in the world. For collectors who desire a more exotic or particular variety, Tan carries out wholesale transactions with teas selected from the family collection. What sets Teaspec apart is that these beautifully packaged teas come with certificates of authenticity and provenance. These come in the form of tea cakes to small dome shaped piles of Pu'er called Tuo and have found retail space in places such as Harrods, London.

For those who are intrigued to start their own collection of Pu'er, Tan has some words of advice: "The perception of Pu'er as a luxury product stems from the fact that aged Pu'er fetches sky high prices in auctions and private transactions. But it should not be considered a luxury product. It is a daily essential which many drink to stay healthy due to its abundant health benefits and there are many produced Pu'er that are very affordable for the masses, for everyday drinking. However, a Pu'er tea collection is a 'soft' investment, like wine or fine art. One should only collect Pu'er because one enjoys the tea to appreciate how the flavour changes in complexity as it matures, and seeing how different storage can produce different results. The fact that Pu'er increases in price over time is a bonus."

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