

Great Taste Awards victory for fresh new local tea producer *Miss McKeown's*



Tiny Bangor tea company *Miss McKeown's* only opened the doors early this year, and is already proving that good things really do come in small packages, winning two prestigious Great Taste Awards on Monday.

Despite the emphasis on beautiful vintage packaging and an ambitious charity donation scheme which sees the company give away one cup of tea for every cup purchased, Angie McKeown, owner, has always believed that the whole offering must be underpinned with quality ingredients and taste.

“Even a basic cup of black tea should have a really good, deep flavour. We only use the best, carefully hand-picked whole leaves and buds from some of the finest tea estates in the world, making the flavour and quality of our tea really stand out. Our fruit and herbal blends use equally high-calibre ingredients, and the delicate balance of flavours in each one is painstakingly tested and refined until we are completely satisfied.

We’re pretty excited to have won awards for two blends at opposite ends of this spectrum, with the purity of the single-ingredient *Assam Gold*, and the subtle and delicate white and green tea blend of *Pear Champagne*, with real fruit pieces.”

Great Taste is simply about taste, not clever branding or smart packaging. Judges are presented with a spoonful of jam, a pie, a slice of salami, or a cup of espresso, with no wrappings, jars or marks – and they taste, confer and re-taste before making a decision.

Any food that a judging team believes is worthy of Great Taste stars is judged by at least two further teams. Only when there is a consensus will an award be given – that means at least 16 judges will have tasted every accredited product. Judged by over 400 of the most demanding palates belonging

to food critics, chefs, cooks, members of the Women's Institute, farmers and a host of food writers and journalists, Great Taste is widely acknowledged as the most respected food accreditation scheme for artisan and speciality food producers.

Coming from the high-growth industry of software development, you would be forgiven for wondering what the attraction was for starting a tea company.

"I have always been passionate about tea, but some years ago now I finally had my first taste of it brewed from good quality, whole leaves - that really convinced me it was a woefully underestimated product. It frustrates me that you see a menu with six different ways of pouring basically the same flavour of coffee bean, yet tea with its amazing variety and subtlety is often presented in only two options; 'Tea' and 'Speciality Tea'.

I wanted people to realise that there was so much more to it, and that even the range and depth of flavour in 'regular' black tea is amazing.

In software you're only ever as good as your last few projects, and that can be stressful, so having more of a product focus is nice. But I also realised that I had this wealth of IT, design and business knowledge that I could bring to bear on this idea and, egged on by my friends, I thought 'Just go for it!'

I had a business plan already, so I went straight to Invest NI, and they have been invaluable in introducing me to buyers, putting me in the loop about trade events, and helping me with my Trademark costs. They also have a lot of free events about Finance and Packaging and all aspects of small business, and those have been a great help.

So what's next for Miss McKeown's?

"We are really humbled by the amount of local support and interest we've received, so we'll keep attending events around the province as I really believe roots and community are important. Our next event is at Bangor Culture Day on 23rd of August.

At the moment we're looking at moving into new premises and taking on some staff as we've definitely out-grown where we are! We also have a great Christmas range coming up, and we're set to expand into a variety of local heritage-site gift shops and food establishments, so you'll definitely be seeing us around and about!"

You can find out more information about what's happening on the Facebook page or you can order tea from the website at www.missmckeowns.com. As a celebration of the Great Taste Awards win, you can use the code WINNER during checkout for free UK delivery until Sunday 17th Aug.