



(Right) Chicago Teahouse's store is filled with endless teas to try. (Below right) A refreshing and comforting cup of tea from Chicago Teahouse is sure to satisfy whether enjoyed in the store or in the comfort of your home. (Opposite page, top) The brand's seasonal tea blends are popular among customers. (Opposite page, bottom) Agnieszka "Agnes" Rapacz, founder of Chicago Teahouse, is proud of the company's recent rebrand.



Chicago Teahouse

A story of persistence and passion

Text by Katherine Ellis
Photography by Marcin Cymmer, Courtesy of Chicago Teahouse

Some tea journeys commence in childhood, when a person discovers the beauty and vast wonder of the treasured leaf, typically through an introduction to the beverage by someone close to them. Others discover the world of tea later in life, through an experience, traveling, or simply “falling into the industry” as a career. For Agnieszka “Agnes” Rapacz, the voyage was a melding of the two paths to tea enlightenment, so to speak, where her familiarity and enjoyment of the elixir as a child was rekindled when she found herself working as the chief financial officer for TeaGschwendner U.S. in 2010.

Agnes grew up in Poland, where drinking tea is very prevalent. “I remember that my mom introduced me to chamomile ‘tea’ when I was a baby,” Agnes recalls. “I never heard about loose-leaf when I was growing up—just regular black tea. When I came to the U.S., there was more tea than just black tea, and that’s how it started.”

After joining the finance department of the American branch of the chain of European tea retailers based in Germany, Agnes unearthed her love for tea and quickly realized how much more there is beyond the black varieties. The savvy businesswoman decided that to better understand the commerce she was working with and learn how to best allocate funds proficiently, she must invest in better tea education for herself. Luckily, the company offered certified tea training for employees, and through much discipline, hard work, and multiple tests proctored by Germany’s board of education, Agnes excelled in her pursuit and became a tea sommelier.

In 2012, the company decided that they didn’t want to operate in the United States any longer, so to her delight, they offered Agnes a U.S. franchise, which resulted in the opening of a second location in Chicago, Illinois. Covering the span of more than a decade, the tea shop evolved and acquired a following of both locals and visitors alike. The Midwest hub for the global brand was named “best tea shop in Chicago” by *Chicago* magazine in 2014, and Agnes was recognized in the category of “successful 40 under 40” by DePaul University around the same time. Considering the continual growth and popularity of the business, Agnes believed that there was more that could be offered and decided to disconnect from the German corporation and create a completely independent entity rather than remain a franchise. She dreamed of extending the tea collections, offering single-origin teas, rebranding, and constructing something all her own. In 2022, Chicago Teahouse came to life—featuring the same products that customers knew and appreciated but with more high-end inventory and a new look—and there’s no going back for the devoted female entrepreneur.



Positioned in the heart of the historic Gold Coast of Chicago, the dynamic store on North State Street affords the tea-loving community—local and across the nation (thanks to an easily searchable e-commerce site)—a plethora of top-notch selections for every palate. “We have white, green, black, oolong, rooibos, and herbals,” Agnes explains. “We also have a collection of in-house blends. We have a very sophisticated clientele here.” Most of the teas are still sourced from Germany, staying true to the original store’s roots, from tea growers that Agnes highly trusts and has formed relationships with over the years. Other varieties, such as their matcha and various exclusive Japanese teas, are produced by a lovely tea garden in Japan. Every batch is lab-tested for pesticides, critically examined, and meticulously handled with the utmost care.

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(Above) The North State Street store in the heart of the historic Gold Coast of Chicago boasts an array of teas, mugs, tea accessories, teapots, gifts, and more to peruse. (Left) The “Earl Grey World” collection is perfect for bergamot lovers and includes blends like Earl Grey Lavender, Earl Grey Lady Violet, Earl Grey Decaf, and Smoky Earl Grey.

While the requisite classic blends are admired and favored, like English Breakfast and Earl Grey, Chicago Teahouse’s specialty curated collections are what set the company apart from the rest. Seasonal assortments for winter, spring, fall, and summer satiate the senses and provide a delicious way to take in the splendor of the moment with flavors evocative of the current season. The creative shop additionally likes to collaborate with various organizations in the metropolitan area to showcase the liveliness, character, and wonderful attractions available in the city. For every special exhibition displayed at the Art Institute of Chicago, the tea house unites with the museum to generate bespoke collections to represent paintings. Among the creations are blends inspired by the iconic masterpieces of Van Gogh and Claude Monet to take one on a sensory experience inspired by art.

These bundles incorporate enticing blends such as Earl Grey Lavender, Aroma Green Tea, Fruit Paradise, Starry Night, and Honey Bee. And for a true taste of the heart and soul of “Chi-town,” consider trying Windy City (a signature blend of black tea, green tea, oolong, caramel, and jasmine) with rich notes and a tantalizing aroma.

Ever since she was a little girl in Poland, Agnes has gravitated toward the comforts that tea provides, but it wasn’t until moving across the world and entering the work force that she discovered just how tremendous one *Camellia sinensis* leaf can be. It goes to show that we should never forget where we came from because it often forms the direction for where we are going. Because of Agnes’s willingness to depart from the expected while staying true to herself, we can now collectively benefit from her knowledge, persistence, passion, and excellent tea, which have all come to fruition in Chicago Teahouse. 🍵

Chicago Teahouse’s products are available in the Chicago shop and online. The store is open Monday through Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., Saturdays from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., and Sundays from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. To peruse their extensive offerings, visit chicagoteahouse.com or call 312-932-0639.