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Steeped in Adventure

Tea leaves have been a thread through Sarah Scarborough's life—from Nashville to China and back.

BY **NANCY VIENNEAU**. PHOTOS BY **DANIELLE ATKINS**.



“A nomad, a traveler—that’s me. You could say it’s in my blood,” Sarah Scarborough, founder of Firepot Nomadic Teas, muses.

Her mother is Finnish; her father is American, so Nashville-born Scarborough grew up living in both countries, as well as a few years in Panama. Instilled with an adventurous spirit, she quickly became versed in the globe-trekking arts. The multi-faceted art of tea—its origins, its place within culture, the techniques and rituals of its brewing and service, its medicinal and meditative qualities—all came to her later.

Scarborough first entered that world in college, where she majored in sustainable agriculture. “I first envisioned myself as both farmer and cook. I studied plants and their properties and became excited about tea,” she says. Her appreciation deepened in Bozeman, Montana, where she worked at Tibetan Trader and Tea—a shop dedicated to the clothing, food, and drink of Nepal and Tibet.

“You might be surprised to learn that Bozeman has an amazing Nepalese connection. At Tibetan Trader, we’d host the Saturday Night World Kitchen on a weekly basis—serving fantastic, global, six-course dinners with tea-based beverages.”

It was during this time that she created her recipe for Firepot Chai—a black tea blended with complex Masala spices, such as cardamom, ginger, star anise, cinnamon, and black peppercorn. It’s as

sweetly aromatic as it is soul soothing. This special recipe remains with her to this day and is the namesake of her new business.

For 15 years Scarborough traveled worldwide seeking out the finest ethically and sustainably grown teas. These journeys took her to the far reaches of Southwest China, to Japan, and to Sri Lanka. Working for her own companies, and as a buyer for the giant, Republic of Tea, Scarborough became an expert in selection. “I geek out finding the best of a variety,” she laughs. She sources at places of origin, with an ethos of doing good for the planet and giving back to the people. “At Firepot Teas one percent of each sale—not profit—goes to the empowerment of women and the preservation of wildlife.”

Since returning to her Nashville roots—now married and the mother of two, Scarborough travels less but is still devoted to promoting the benefits of tea. “Whether steeped in a pot or used as an ingredient in food,” she says, “tea can be anything and everything you want: solace, community, medicine, and meditation.”

Beginning this spring, you’ll be able to find her fine teas and tea blends at the Firepot Nomadic Tea shop that she’s opening in 12 South. In the meantime, you can find them at coffeehouses around town. As Scarborough works on her first cookbook, *Nomadic Tea Party*, she’s also planning “pop-up” tea parties to educate and inspire folks about tea. (*Firepot Nomadic Teas, 2905 12th Ave. S.; firepot.com*)



**Sarah Scarborough's
Tip for Steeping
Loose-leaf Green Tea:**

Green tea should never be over-steeped, and the water should be about 180 degrees—or 5 minutes of cooling down after coming to a boil. Pour over 1 tablespoon of loose leaf tea in a 2-cup container, and allow to steep 3 to 5 minutes. The leaves will unfurl and release their beneficial oils.





Sri Lankan Love Cake

Makes 1 cake or 24 mini cake bites

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup raw cashews
 4 ounces butter at room temperature
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup semolina
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sugar
 A pinch of salt
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup pumpkin preserve* (or any other fruit preserve)
 5 egg yolks
 1 tablespoon honey
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon ground nutmeg
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon ground cinnamon
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon ground cardamom
 $\frac{3}{4}$ teaspoon citrus zest
 1 tablespoon rose water (optional)**

Preheat oven to 325°F.

Prepare a bread pan, petit four or madeline pans with butter and flour. Grind cashew nuts into a flour (a Cuisinart works well for this). Set aside.

Beat the egg yolks and sugar together until thick (2 or so minutes with an electric mixer). Set aside.

In a large bowl, thoroughly combine the semolina and cashew flour with the butter.

Add all remaining ingredients and combine.

Pour or spoon the batter into the molds and bake for 25 to 30 minutes, depending on the pan you are using, until the top is golden brown and a wooden skewer comes out clean.

To make pumpkin preserve: In a saucepan, cook 1 cup of grated pumpkin or winter squash flesh with 1 cup of sugar and 1 tablespoon of rose water on medium heat for 10 minutes. If the pumpkin you are using is watery, press it in a colander or hang it in a cheesecloth until most of the moisture has drained.*

***To make rose water: steep 1 tablespoon of dried rose petals in 6 ounces of boiling water for 5 minutes.*

Firepot Chai Fried Chicken

Serves 4

3 pounds of chicken pieces (tender strips work well)
 1 quart of Firepot Chai concentrate (available online at firepot.com)
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup salt
 3 eggs, beaten with a few tablespoons of water
 2 cups corn flour
 Peanut oil for frying

Combine the chicken with the chai concentrate and salt and refrigerate overnight or up to 2 days.

Heat the oil to 350°F in a deep pot or cast iron dutch oven. Don't fill the pot more than half way with oil.

Put the beaten eggs and water in a bowl next to a bowl of corn flour. Drain the chai from the chicken and dredge the chicken in the egg mixture first and then the corn flour. Drop the coated chicken in the pot of hot oil. Cook on each side for 5 to 6 minutes until cooked through.

Place chicken on brown paper or paper towels to drain. To serve, garnish with fresh cilantro and serve with a cucumber raita or mango pickle.