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STEEP

LOOSE LEAF

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

"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, 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 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, but Bozeman has this 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, black peppercorn—that's as sweetly aromatic as it is soul-soothing. The recipe abides with her to this day and forms the foundation of her business.

For 15 years, Scarborough traveled worldwide seeking out the finest ethically and sustainably grown teas. These journeys have taken her to the far reaches of Southwest China to Japan, Sri Lanka,

and the lands down under. Working for her own companies and as a buyer for the giant, Republic of Tea, Scarborough became an expert in selection. She sources at places of origin, with an ethos of doing good for the planet and giving back to the people.

"I geek out finding the best of a variety," she laughs. "And one percent of each sale—not profit—goes to the empowerment of women and the preservation of wildlife."

These days, she has returned to her Nashville roots. Married and the mother of two, she is traveling 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: so-lace, community, medicine, meditation."

Starting 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. Scarborough also plans "pop-up" tea parties to educate and inspire folks about tea, as she works on her first cookbook, *Nomadic Tea Party*. (Firepot Nomadic Teas, 2905 12th Ave. S.; firepot.com) —Nancy Vienmeau



Sarah Scarborough



► 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.

