



make way for tea in BOSTON

In a city known for a famous 1773 tea party, havens for taking tea are abundant again.

Text and Photography by Bruce Richardson

Many well-read tea drinkers became familiar with Boston's iconic landmarks, perhaps, through the illustrations of Robert McCloskey's timeless 1941 children's book, *Make Way for Ducklings*. If Mrs. Mallard were inclined to take her eight ducklings on a tour of Boston today, she might be enticed to stop

now and then for tea. At the 1987 statue of the Mallard family beside the lagoon in the Boston Public Gardens, you are within walking distance of many delicious tea venues. So, get your ducklings in a row, mind the traffic, and come waddle with me on an adventure across one of America's great cities—with tea on your mind, of course.



TAJ BOSTON

15 Arlington Street • Boston, MA
617-536-5700 • tajhotels.com/boston

The grand Taj Boston hotel boasts a commanding view overlooking the colorful west entrance of Boston Public Garden and the swan boats gliding across the lagoon. The Taj provides a convenient base for seeing the city and a perfect sanctuary for enjoying an elegant Old-World afternoon tea in the heart of Back Bay, Boston.

Afternoon tea is served Friday through Sunday in the second-floor French Room. Tall windows and crystal chandeliers light this gilded salon, where guests sit in high-back chairs or on comfortable sofas. The setting is reminiscent of a London lobby tea, complete with beautiful porcelain teapots placed upon silver warmers, curved three-tiered silver servers delivered by jacketed waiters, and music provided by either a harpist or a violinist.

Several tea-meal choices await. For younger guests, there is a children's tea. For adults, two of the most popular are The Duchess, for those who want just a few sweets and pastries accompanied by a pot of tea, or the Taj Royal. The latter is the grande dame of afternoon teas in Boston. It comes complete with all the expected English tea sandwiches and a few bright surprises, such as a lobster profiterole (this is New England) and a wonderful prosciutto and melon canapé. Fruit curds and traditional Devonshire cream accompany the scrumptious scones. Be prepared to request a take-away box because there are more incredible desserts than anyone can consume in a two-hour repast. (I have tried—three times—and failed.)

More than 22 selections of tea are on the tea list, making it one of the largest in the city, with choices from all the tea families, as well as herbals and tisanes.

THE BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY

700 Boylston Street • Boston, MA
617-859-2251 • bpl.org

The magnificent Boston Public Library, America's first public library, welcomes 2 million visitors annually to its Boylston Square location. Patrons first pass a set of colossal marble lions guarding the front plaza before entering through Italianate bronze doors that lead to one of the city's most loved treasure troves of literary and artistic delights.

Another hidden treasure awaits guests at the Courtyard Restaurant, just inside the main entrance. Afternoon tea unfolds in this handsome barrel-vaulted room, which is lit by brilliant palladium windows, Wednesday through Friday from 2:00 until 4:00 p.m., and reservations are suggested.

This literary tea is composed of all the expected traditional teatime sandwiches, such as cucumber, salmon, and chicken. Other seasonal offerings include a fresh adaptation of tomato and crumbled bacon or watercress and lemon aioli. Warm scones with cream and jam are also part of the repast, and, while the tea list is not extensive, it does contain a balance of classic and flavored blends steeped to perfection.

There is something very gratifying about celebrating afternoon tea in this century-old temple devoted to the humanities. Like tea, it is both stimulating and quieting. I always feel a bit more alive and connected to civilized society upon leaving.

I visit this library over and over again because it is home to Edwin Abbey's richly colored paintings of *The Quest of the Holy Grail*, and John Singer Sargent's Biblical murals adorn the walls of the third-floor gallery. Do take time to ascend the palatial staircase to see these great art treasures.



London's venerable Langham Hotel was the first to serve afternoon tea in that city. They have re-created their award-winning tea tradition, complete with specially designed porcelain china by Wedgwood, in their new Boston lobby lounge called The Reserve.

THE LANGHAM

250 Franklin Street • Boston, MA
617-451-1900 • boston.langhamhotels.com

The name Langham has been synonymous with afternoon tea since it was first served in the Palm Court of the original Langham London Hotel in 1865. That celebration of tea history continues today with the Boston edition of the Langham brand.

This fortresslike property in the heart of the Financial District was once the Federal Reserve Bank and is now a national architectural landmark. Built in 1922 in Renaissance Revival style, the bank was converted to a hotel in 1981. Clues to the building's moneyed history can still be found if you do a bit of exploring. The marble stairs of the center entrance lead to the Bond Restaurant, a templelike room that once served as the bank lobby. Two original N.C. Wyeth murals, commissioned by the Federal Reserve Bank, still adorn the original third-floor boardroom.

The hotel's signature Tiffin afternoon tea is served just

off the first-floor lobby in the newly renovated lounge, The Reserve. The origins of the word *tiffin* are derived from the Indian English slang *tiffing* (taking a little drink or sip). All Langham hotels worldwide continue that tradition by calling their teatimes "Tiffin at The Langham."

The hotel serves four specially created tea blends, along with a full variety of loose teas by Harney & Sons. All are served in custom-made Wedgwood china teapots by a team of meticulously trained staff.

Executive Chef Mark Sapienza has designed an assortment of savory finger sandwiches including coronation chicken salad, house smoked salmon on Boston brown bread, and egg and chive on brioche. Cream scones are served with traditional Devonshire clotted cream and jam, along with sweets such as raspberry linzer, Boston cream pie, fruit tarts, and tea cakes. For those desiring an even grander teatime celebration, The Langham offers a Maine lobster salad and a glass of champagne.

It might be wise to book a guest room ahead for the evening, just in case you feel too full to move about after all these decadent indulgences.



The Wenham Tea House has welcomed guests for over a century. Its current operators continue to serve all the right ingredients for a perfect afternoon tea—beautiful foods, flowers, and fine teas served in a serene and historical setting.

WENHAM TEA HOUSE

4 Monument Street • Wenham, MA
978-468-1398 • wenhamteahouse.com

The American tearoom fad had its genesis in New England at the beginning of the 20th century. And no area of Massachusetts was riper for this phenomenon than the quaint towns and villages that stretch from Cape Cod to Cape Ann. Tucked away on a quiet side street in the town of Wenham is a tearoom that recently celebrated its 100th birthday.

Wenham, founded by English settlers in 1635, is approximately an hour north of Boston. Following the advent of the automobile, Boston families on weekend excursions began taking the road through the village, often in search of a suitable place to enjoy lunch or afternoon refreshments. One local philanthropic organization decided to take advantage of all those hungry travelers. In 1912, a small group of spirited women from the Wenham Village Improvement Society purchased Mr. Henry Hobb's harness shop as a home for their new teahouse and an exchange for selling ladies' handiwork, jams, and jellies. The Wenham Tea House and Exchange was established and continues as one of our nation's oldest tea rooms, still raising funds for the Wenham Village Improvement Society.



Henry's Fine Food, new operator of the Wenham Tea House, is another long-established business. Manager Chris Keohane, wearing white gloves, said the goal for their newly revamped afternoon tea is to return to times past in service and presentation, a characteristic he worries is often lost in contemporary food service. His food and service today are reminiscent of the dining experience of a century ago—with the exception of the casual attire of the customers and the occasional ring of a cell phone. The tables are set with a lace over-cloth and napkins folded in the Lady Windermere's Fan style, complete with napkin rings. A balanced combination of traditional tea sandwiches, scones, and other homemade sweets served on three-tiered servers fills the menu.

But diners from a century ago never experienced the array of teas now offered on the Wenham Tea House tea list. There are selections to satisfy a multitude of tastes. All are well made in clear glass pots and kept at the right temperature by glass warmers that add a nice glow to the table setting.

The Wenham Tea House is a historical landmark that should be on the to-experience list of all true tearoom lovers. After all, a 100-year legacy of hospitality centered around tea is something we should continue to nurture.

JOLIE TEA COMPANY

26 Bay Road • Hamilton, MA
978-468-5654 • jolieteaco.com

Amy Job made a life-changing decision a few years ago when she mustered the courage to turn a 20-year-old dream into a vocation. After a long career in biology and cancer research, she entered culinary school and eventually opened Jolie Tea Company in the north Boston village of Hamilton. Now, rather than staring into test tubes and microscopes, Amy spends her days sniffing teas and herbs while creating exotic blends—all to the delight of her faithful customers.

The art of creating blends seems to spark a great deal of passion in this entrepreneur's eyes. "Tea is very personal because people's tastes in tea are closely linked to memory," she says. "We're starting to make individualized tea profiles for customers. Once we've determined a profile, we'll keep it on record in the shop to make it easy to order refills." These profiles serve as recipes for tea blends based on 10 aspects of a person's preferences in flavors and smells, as well as their memory associations.

She and her staff are always eager to lead customers on a sensory-filled tour of the teas lining the shelves. They are also happy to steep a sample cup for you as well.

A passionate Francophile, Amy chose the French adjective *jolie* (nice) as her tea store's moniker. And everything about her sophisticated shop is very nice, from the beautiful glass jars displaying her colorful blends to the *haute couture* tea-bag dress adorning her front window. It's an uncluttered, bright, and welcoming space where customers leisurely browse the shelves for items they need to fulfill their own teatime dreams.

Customers can't help but notice the company slogan, proudly proclaimed on the staff's aprons. It asks the ancient question "Is the tea in you?" This query is homage to an ancient Japanese proverb: *If a man has no tea in him, he is incapable of understanding truth and beauty.*

"I believe tea, when done thoughtfully and artfully, is a vehicle to truth and beauty," Amy explains. Tea and beauty are tastefully articulated in her tea shop, and that is exactly what makes her store *très jolie*.



L'ESPALIER

774 Boylston Street • Boston, MA
617-262-3023 • lespalier.com

Would an afternoon tea on the theme of *Make Way for Ducklings* or Little Red Riding Hood's basket pique your interest? Boston tea sommelier Cynthia Gold is responsible for the refined "Fantasy Tea Party" service and unique tea blends found at the acclaimed French restaurant L'Espalier, just a couple of blocks up Boylston Street from Copley Square.

Cynthia left the corporate world more than a decade ago to pursue a career in the culinary arts. She honed her skills at Johnson & Wales University and later at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York. With this culinary training, she has cooked at a multitude of Boston's finest restaurants. It wasn't long before her passion for tea led to her becoming one of the first chefs in America to practice the art of cooking with tea. Her clever flavor combinations are evident in the tea-infused recipes showcased on the menu. Many of her recipes can be found in her 2010 illustrated cookbook, *Culinary Tea*.

Cynthia has crafted a sophisticated tea list featuring some of the classics from around the world, as well as custom blends such as L'Espalier Afternoon Blend, a satisfying combination of black teas from Darjeeling and Sri Lanka with Chinese jasmine green tea and subtle notes of bergamot. The talented tea smith not only created L'Espalier signature teas but has also developed a full line of spirited tea cocktails, which infuse teas into the mix—a first for Boston.

If a spirited, sophisticated, and artful afternoon tea is on your travel list, you'll find that all the ingredients come together at L'Espalier.





DUNBAR TEA SHOP

1 Water Street • Sandwich, MA
508-833-2485 • dunbarteachop.com

Cape Cod, with its Early American villages, saltbox houses, shops, lighthouses, and pristine beaches, lies a short drive south of Boston. One of the first towns you find on the cape is also the oldest. Sandwich, founded in 1637, is centered around the 1830 First Church of Christ and its soaring spire reminiscent of London churches designed by Christopher Wren.

One of New England's best-known tearooms rests within the shadow of the First Church spire. Since opening in 1991, the Dunbar Tea Shop has been featured in many guides, newspapers, and magazines from around the world. Tea is served in a former carriage house, located to the right of the circa-1740 house where owners Paula and Jim Hegarty reside. The main dining room was once a wood-paneled smoking and billiard room, reserved only for gentlemen. Now it is home to the clinking of teacups rather than billiard balls, and the air is filled with the aroma of baking pies, cakes, short-breads, and scones rather than pipe smoke. The tearoom has a warm fireplace to fight off the chill of stiff winter winds. Guests may also have tea in a new glass-enclosed dining room or, on warm days, in a shady tea garden.

Anyone who has traveled to the British Isles will feel right at home with a menu featuring such favorites as Ploughman's Lunch, Smoked Scottish Salmon Platter, English crumpets, petticoat shortbread, and, of course, scones with jam and cream. Guests should pace themselves so they save room for a slice of one of the cakes or pies displayed on the buffet. Portions are huge, and most customers are seen leaving with a sack of leftovers to enjoy at home.

In true British style, the tea is left loose in the pot and accompanied by a silver strainer. Cozies keep the tea piping hot.

The Hegartys have found a winning way to make a visit to Cape Cod a deliciously satisfying experience by blending the memories of old England with the best hospitality New England has to offer.

SANDWICH GLASS MUSEUM

129 Main Street • Sandwich, MA
508-888-0251 • sandwichglassmuseum.org

Directly across the town bridge from the Dunbar Tea Shop stands the Sandwich Glass Museum. In the mid-1820s, American manufacturers began to experiment with pressing glass, using a lever-operated machine. The Boston and Sandwich Glass Factory, started in 1825, was quick to utilize the pressing machine, and it turned out thousands of pressed-glass items known today as Sandwich Glass.

One of the first items easily and cheaply pressed was the cup plate. Many Chinese export teacups of that era were tea bowls that came without saucers or handles, and it was sometimes the custom in the early 19th century to drink tea from a saucer. The inexpensive pressed-glass cup plate became the coaster that prevented water rings from forming as teacups rested on the tea table. These small glass trivets were eventually pressed with custom images and were mass-produced as souvenirs for weddings, political campaigns, and vacation destinations. The Sandwich Glass Museum houses one of the country's largest collections of cup plates, as well as colorful exhibitions focusing on the history of pressed glass in America.



Contributing Editor Bruce Richardson serves as Tea Master for the Boston Tea Party Ships & Museum. He and his wife, Shelley, are owners of Elmwood Inn Fine Teas and Benjamin Press.