

TEAROOM



TEMPEST

A steaming Wedgwood cup. Scones with clotted cream. Finger sandwiches . . .

The veddy English practice of lingering over afternoon tea is taking the Valley by storm

by Anitra Brown

The English can be intimidating to Americans, especially when we know that they know volumes more about a subject than we do — tea, for instance. So when I sat down to tea with Lou and Angela Jones, an English couple who recently opened A Spot of Tea, a very proper tearoom in Rhinebeck, I was uneasy. Could I eat the warm scone before the cold finger sandwiches? Should I pour milk into the cup before or after the tea was poured? And why was Angela saying to Lou, "Will you be mother?"

I mentioned my anxieties, and Lou just waved them away. "Nobody monitors you, nobody watches you." And then, being mother, he poured tea for everyone. "Do whatever you like," he says, with one proviso. "Unruly children? We don't want them. Keep them at home."

For all his reassurances, a few basics can help novices to better appreciate all the tearooms popping up in the Valley. First, a good tearoom will use proper teapots, not present you with a cup with a teabag hanging in it. Second, it should make a really good scone — golden and crisp on the outside, soft on the inside. Third, it should be the kind of place you want to sit for an hour or so, preferably with a friend who likes a good cup of tea as much as you do.

And just so you don't embarrass yourself with your English friends by inviting them to "high tea," you should know that sitting down to a tea with finger sandwiches, scones, and cakes is simply called "afternoon tea" in England. "High tea" is a small hot meal usually served around 6 p.m.; it was traditionally taken as a dinner substitute by the working classes. "A lot of Americans interpret 'high tea' as being something higher in social standing," explains Jones. "But it's not."

The best tea is made from the top two leaves and the bud of the *camellia sinensis* bush, and loose leaf is generally higher quality than tea bags. That's because it's made up of whole tea leaves, while broken pieces, called "fannings" and "dust," go into bags. There are three types: black teas are made from fermented leaves; green from unfermented leaves; and oolong from semi-fermented leaves. India (which

A Spot of Tea in Rhinebeck is the place to go for an authentic English tea.





includes regions like Assam and Darjeeling), China, Sri Lanka, Japan, and Kenya are the world's great tea-growing countries. Herbal brews like chamomile and peppermint are not really teas because they're not made from *camellia sinensis*. They are properly called infusions.

But the most important thing you need to know is how nice it is to have a cup of tea on a cold, blustery day...or a summer afternoon, for that matter. As William Gladstone said, "If you are cold, tea will warm you; if you are too heated, it will cool you; if you are depressed, it will cheer you; if you are excited, it will calm you."

There are now so many tearooms in the Hudson Valley that — no matter if you're cold, warm, depressed, or excited — you shouldn't have to travel too far to find one.

good eating. Local eggs, sweet cream butter, and Madagascar vanilla go into many of the desserts that are baked in the second-floor kitchen, and she believes in using local produce, in season.

Devereux was an interior designer in Manhattan, and the Village Tearoom is visually very pleasing, with three warm, well-lit dining rooms — one upstairs and two down. Original beams and doors give a rustic feel. The Village Tearoom is open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, serving everything from quiche Lorraine to roasted chicken with apple chutney.

While you can have a good pot of tea with baked goods at any hour, Devereux also serves a classic afternoon tea (\$18), where you get the full treatment — tea and a three-tiered tray with tea sandwiches

organic, and locally roasted. • 10 Plattekill Ave., New Paltz (Ulster). 845-255-3434.

A SPOT OF TEA

If you're looking for an authentic English tearoom, complete with scones, fairy cakes, and a tinkling bell on the door, this is the place. "I've gone to great lengths to make you feel like you're in England the moment you step through the door," says Lou Jones, who bakes most of the desserts from scratch and makes homemade clotted cream. The tearoom also has one-year-old Christmas puddings for sale. The food is impeccable, which is not surprising when you consider Jones's day job. He teaches at the Culinary Institute of America, in the Escoffier Restaurant, no less. And he led the U.S. Armed Forces team to



THE VILLAGE TEAROOM

Walk into the Village Tearoom in New Paltz and you'll be faced with such a stunning display of baked goods that you won't ever want to go to Starbucks again. Slices of lemon-lavender pound cake, plump cream puffs covered with shiny chocolate icing, charming checkerboard cookies, and chocolate chubbies all call out to be eaten.

Once a tailor's shop, the tearoom is located in a charming 174-year-old building at the top of a gravel slope across from Ariel Booksellers. It is the work of Agnes Devereux, who was born in Ireland, where she helped feed the guests in her family's small hotel. She and her husband moved from New York City to their two children could go to the Mountain Laurel Waldorf School in New Paltz. She has a leaning toward gustatory purity that makes for

(including house-cured gravlax and organic chicken salad), your choice of an apricot-almond-oatmeal scone or a lemon-scented golden raisin scone (served with Devonshire clotted cream and raspberry jam), and an assortment of cookies, such as pecan tassies, madeleines, crumiri, and chocolate chubbies. The house tea is Barry's Classic Blend, which is Irish Breakfast, but there are dozens of other unusual varieties, including Mayan Spiced Chai, Organic Darjeeling, and the very delicate White Tea. She serves it in heavy white earthenware, rather than thin bone china, because she prefers the more rustic look.

"People like a good cup of tea, but they usually let it steep too long and it gets tannic," says Devereux. But she's not so ideologically pure that you can't get a good cup of coffee — as long as it's fair trade,

gold in the Frankfurt Culinary Olympics back in 1992, a victory that resulted in his being named a Member of the British Empire. That's some pretty heavy-hitting talent for a tearoom.

A Spot of Tea occupies the first floor of a white clapboard house in Rhinebeck that dates from 1795. It has a very homey atmosphere. In one room, there is a fireplace with a sofa and rug set in front of it; a painting of Queen Elizabeth hangs over the mantel in another. An engraving of thoroughbreds decorates one of the walls, and there are English candies (care for a Yorkie, anyone?) and fancy teapots for sale.

Jones is trying to gently educate his customers that "high tea" is not what many of us think it is, but he understands our desire for something special and elegant. His solution is Royal Tea for Two (\$35), a classic afternoon tea served on Royal Doul-

ton bone china. You get a choice of two kinds of absolutely delicious finger sandwiches, like thick slices of smoked salmon and homemade mayonnaise on his homemade white or wheat bread. Fresh scones are served with classic strawberry jam and clotted cream that Jones makes himself. (The cream is provided by local dairy herds.) Jamaican ginger cake, baked with molasses and brown sugar, is cut in generous slices. The crowning glory: adorable fairy cakes, smaller than cupcakes, are sliced and stuffed with real buttercream. The Harney & Sons teas are full-leaf teas in "silk sachets," and the flavor is excellent.

"We don't have an enormous selection of teas, and that's by choice," says Jones. "An English tearoom might only have one." He offers at least 10 different

JEANIE BEAN BRITISH TEA SHOP

For 20 years, David and Jeanie Bean worked long hours at their country store in tiny Clinton Corners, up at 3:30 in the morning to start the day selling cold cuts, hair nets, and fishing poles. They're done with that. The store has been turned into a tearoom that also sells English provisions, and it's open only on weekends from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. They stop serving at 3:30.

Wait a minute — isn't four o'clock tea time? "We close then because that's when I want to close," says Jeanie Bean, an energetic, diminutive Englishwoman who loves to watch the sunset. She takes a moment to address a large table of customers across the room. "Oh, shut up!" she cries, to great peals of laughter. Jeanie was

cream, from Jeanie's mum's own recipe, is good. But begging her mum's pardon, I liked the rich, warm coconut bread pudding — a little dish of bread cubes soaked in coconut cream, eggs, milk, and sugar — even better.

The old country-store setting is a little unorthodox, but the Beans pull it off. Sheer curtains help define the dining space in the back of the store, where shelves are filled with teapots, English Christmas crackers, and the teas. The front of the store has English groceries — everything from Walker's potato crisps to Fairy Toilet Soap — and a sofa in case customers need to recover after eating. "We once almost locked a man in here," confides Jeanie. "He was asleep on the couch." • 2411 Salt Point Turnpike, Clinton Corners (Dutchess). 845-266-3800.



Tea all over the map (left to right): delicious baked goods at the Village Tea-room in New Paltz; a scone and a cuppa (or perhaps a "stodgy meal") at Jeanie Bean in rural Dutchess County; cloth-covered tables at Kathleen's Tea Room in Peekskill

teas, including herbal infusions and decaf. You can also get a pot of Cadbury's hot chocolate.

Jones has a number of "set teas" that are served all day: a Cream Tea (\$6 per person) with a homemade scone; Farmhouse Tea (\$8) with boiled eggs, toast, and a slice of cake; and Cornish Tea (\$12) with a scone and a Cornish pasty (a warm short-crust pastry filled with ground meat and vegetables that evolved from a portable meal Cornish miners once carried to work). Heartier appetites are satisfied by the excellent fish and chips, available on the menu or for takeout Wednesday through Saturday. "Englishmen have been coming out of the woodwork since we opened," says Jones. Where else can you get a good chip butty and a good pot of tea? • 55 East Market St., Rhinebeck (Dutchess). 845-876-1842; www.aspotoftea.biz

in the theater and still likes an audience. "People come here for the entertainment," she explains. "They get my rudeness and David's civility."

This is not the place for a fancy afternoon tea with delicate finger sandwiches, the crusts sliced off. Its specialty is what Jeanie calls "stodgy meals" — home-cooked bangers and mash, fish and chips, shepherd's pie, and a burger made with locally raised Scottish Belted Galloway beef. She sells her own private label loose teas, and you can order a pot (\$3.95) with dessert, like a currant scone that has been cut in half, buttered, coated with a thick layer of strawberry jam, and topped off with a frothy cap of whipped cream (\$5.95). "We tried clotted cream but people scraped it off," says David (who played a Jet in the film version of *West Side Story*). The warm English bread pudding with custard and

KATHLEEN'S TEA ROOM

Kathleen Chilcott has figured out what to do with little children who come to her tearoom in the heart of downtown Peekskill: give them a "room" of their own. "I have a display window that's set up with a little table and chairs, gaudy jewelry, and hats. The children keep themselves busy, and the mothers get to have tea. And it delights me to see them in there!"

With its blazing fire, floral- and stripe-covered tables, high tin ceiling, and antique tea memorabilia, this tearoom charms more than just children. "I wanted to bring things back to a 1940s feeling," says Chilcott, who realized while traveling in England with her husband how nice it is to stop and get a cup of tea and something light to eat. "Every village should have a tearoom," she says.

Kathleen serves "high tea" (\$16.50),