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the un-starbucks of tea

posted by **Naja Hayward** | 2 comments

When I first launched my tea company, Naja Tea, I was heading in the direction of opening a tea lounge - the type of place where tea lovers could unite and share in social experiences centered around good-quality, loose-leaf tea. I envisioned having many of these lounges around the country, each welcoming students, intellectuals, and curious minds alike to celebrate life, breathe, laugh, and reflect - all over a really good cup of tea.

Like many of my fellow tea entrepreneurs, I would share with my friends and anyone who would listen that I wanted to build the "Starbucks of tea." At the time, it was an original thought - at least in my mind. It was ingenious! I've since realized that many have endeavored to go the route of turning our coffee-crazed culture into one that was totally tea. Of course, I've met the naysayers that say tea can never be shared on the scale we've witnessed with the bean.

In early October, I was presented with an opportunity to open my first tea space. One of my wholesale customers, **Sasha's – Living with Style**, had a quaint space in her vintage-bungalow-home-turned-boutique where the owner/designer, Sasha Witte, met with clients and stocked her colorful array of design books and swatches. As we met one afternoon to discuss a new tea selection to accompany those already served and sold in the retail kitchen portion of the chic store, I was drawn to this room - one I had seen dozens of times before. But this time, instead of seeing an interior designer's work space, I saw opportunity. And whenever opportunity knocks, I'm there to open the door! This was my chance to open the UN-Starbucks of tea!



We've been open for almost two months now and have plans to stay open through the holidays, sharing our wares, educating guests on tea through private tea tastings, and offering specialty gift items for tea lovers and those that love them. **Naja Tea Tasting Room & Boutique** is a quaint space for tasting and sampling our specialty teas. It has a bit of a *Cheers* vibe and seems to invite people to share their life story. This is what I love.

This first venture into the retail tea world is the beginning of a new adventure for me. It's been received with open arms and the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. My mind is working diligently each day to figure out how to use my tasting-room concept to bring the beloved leaf to those that appreciate what it has to offer. This is an exciting time in my life!

Although there may never be a "Starbucks of tea," it's becoming clear - as real tea enthusiasts continue to design ways to bring their tea concepts to life - that even Starbucks is trying to find its way with the leaf.

