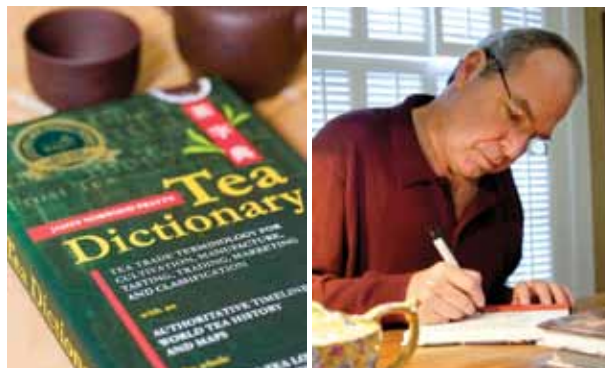


James Norwood Pratt's *Tea Dictionary*

Review and Photography by Bruce Richardson



Tea lovers have a voracious appetite for gathering more and more information about their favorite beverage. They love all the little stories and anecdotes about tea culture and commerce. But where does one turn to find the correct spelling of a certain Chinese tea, the location of a favorite tea garden, the definition of a tea grade like *Orange Pekoe*, or the origin of a term such as *Second Flush*?

When it comes to describing your tea, would you rather sip a *brassy* tea or a tea that's *long in the mouth*? Are you aware that high-grown Nilgiri teas are *forgiving* while Darjeeling teas are not? Did you know that the world's largest collection of porcelain Veilleuse-Théières is located in Trenton, Tennessee? And how did it come to pass that the English tea caddy is named for the Malay word *kati*, meaning a measure of tea weighing about 1.3 pounds?

These are just a few of the hundreds of tea definitions and facts found in *James Norwood Pratt's Tea Dictionary*.

Chronicles of tea throughout history

Lu Yu was the first to write about tea history and instructions for proper steeping in *The Classic of Tea* in A.D. 780. His task was relatively easy. For this earliest of tea sages, the world of tea did not extend beyond the borders of his homeland of China. There were no Englishmen drinking tea with milk, no cups with handles, no tea bags, no iced tea, no talk of antioxidants, and no other word for tea than the symbol *cha*. He simply wrote a compendium about his immediate tea world.

In 1935, W.H. Ukers took on the task of chronicling the international tea trade in his encyclopedic *All About Tea*. The hefty two-volume set was purchased primarily by tea professionals, and only 750 copies were printed. After all, how many people were really interested in studying tea in depth at the time?

Seventy-five years after Uker's guide was published, the world of tea experienced its greatest growth since the expansion of the British tea industry into Sri Lanka and India in the late 19th century. The past two decades have brought about greater consumer awareness of tea growing and manufacturing, tea trade, tea equipage, tea and health studies, and an explosion of tea terminology.

With so many new teas emerging from various countries of origin, each with their own customs and language, it was time again to gather the growing mountain of

tea information and catalog anew our expanding tea lexicon into a common tome. The culture of tea needed an updated authoritative resource, yet the task appeared daunting.

The challenge of writing a contemporary tea dictionary fell to San Francisco writer James Norwood Pratt and India tea professionals Devan Shah and Ravi Sutodiya. Along the way, they enlisted the help of Chinese tea experts Chen Zhongmao and Lily Talise Chang in a collaborative effort that encompassed more than six years of research and writing.

A contemporary tea sage

James Norwood Pratt's exceptional talent for writing, coupled with his dynamic passion for tea, makes him the perfect voice for all that is happening in the burgeoning world tea scene. Pratt's love of language is forever evident in his publications. Rather than a pure lexicon with dry definitions of tea terms, *Tea Dictionary* can rightly be called a "golden book" of tea knowledge. Readers will enjoy leafing through the pages to find unknown terms and titles, as well as definitions of tea bits and pieces that occasionally suffer abuse by well-intentioned speakers and writers. He even interjects a few of his prejudices along with advice for tea novices. For instance, in the definition of *cuppa*, he ends by preaching, "Vulgar still after all these years. Avoid!" And he ends a lengthy discourse on the illusive muscatel characteristic of Darjeeling tea by adding, "However explained, muscatel is to be greatly wished for by all concerned." That's good advice when evaluating those high-priced teas.

"Today's tea lovers can lay claim to all the world's tea traditions," Pratt writes in his introduction. "From Japanese cha-no-yu to Russian samovars to English scones in the afternoon, Indian chai, and China Pu-Er. We are all learning names for the new experiences." With such an eager and growing audience, this dictionary promises to be the go-to reference book for students of tea worldwide.

James Norwood Pratt's *Tea Dictionary*, *Tea Society Press* (2009), \$150. *TeaTime* readers receive a \$50 discount when ordering autographed copies directly from the author at jnptea@gmail.com or 415-922-7587 (Pacific Time Zone).