

# Moving Tea Flavors Forward

Strategies for developing new and authentic profiles for a growing array of applications

“Tea is the new coffee, but better,” says IFF flavorist Marie Wright. Working with R&D, a flavorist team, and Ed Nappen, technical category director for beverages, Wright has endeavored over the last year to create tea flavors that impart authenticity and bring a greater variety of profiles to the public. Working from “gold standards” drawn from Asian tea plantations, the team has developed a range of tea flavors including white peony, longjing, gyokuro green, oolong Tie Guan Yin, Darjeeling, jasmine green and chrysanthemum. The goal, as Wright puts it, is to capture each variety’s unique character to add differentiation to applications: “the hearty toasted molasses notes of Darjeeling, the delicate apricot and brown spice character of Nantou Oolong and the fresh-cut grass aroma of Long Jing.”

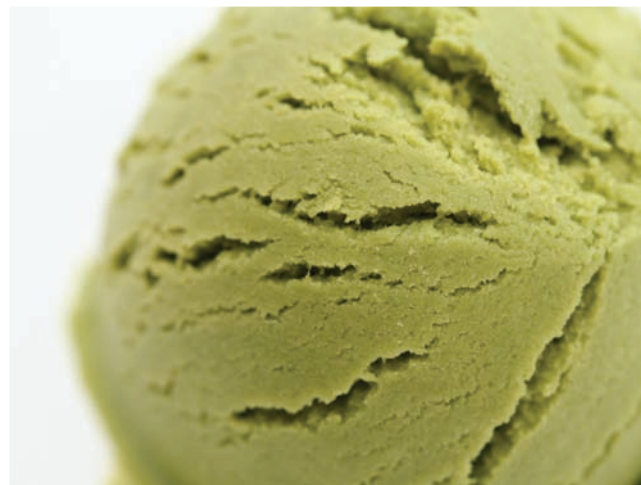
“Tea has a certain mystery and mystique about it,” says Nappen. “We wanted to uncover some of that. The more we learn about tea, the more we were inspired to learn about it.”

“As flavorists, we use high-end teas as our target gold standards,” adds Wright. “They’re a little bit like wines. The small estates grow teas that taste amazing and sell for hundreds of dollars to the highest-rated restaurants. We’re using those teas as our target profiles to elevate the quality of our products.”

“The main opportunity [for tea flavors] is beverage applications,” Nappen says, but adds that tea has moved beyond classic RTD iced tea to include waters, sport and energy drinks, carbonated beverages, alcoholic drinks, confections, ice cream, and savory applications such as salad dressings, marinades and sauces.

## Tea Fragrance

Over the years, Wright has collaborated with IFF perfumer Christophe Laudamiel on a number of novel projects. Their latest collaboration—*Cha*—draws upon the company’s tea flavor research, but avoids literality. “Nobody wants to smell like a cup of tea,” she says. The company unveiled the scent at this year’s Taste<sup>3</sup> food conference in Napa Valley ([taste3.com](http://taste3.com)). “He has done a spectacular job,” says Wright. “It’s extremely inspirational to see the complexity of notes. Laudamiel was very excited by the tea attributes he hadn’t considered before.”



“The main opportunity [for tea flavors] is beverage applications,” says Ed Nappen, though tea has increasingly appeared in applications as diverse as marinades and ice creams.

“We’re surprised at how these tea flavors taste,” says Wright. “We’ve just tried one in a seasoning we call ‘Oolong Pacific Crunch Nut,’ a wonderful tea granola. We started this project thinking the target market would be tea beverage applications, but now that we’ve gotten into this and discovered the intrigue and complexity of these different profiles, we realized that the flavors lend themselves very well right across the range of applications. It has revealed opportunities we didn’t think existed when we started.”

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-Marie Wright



Marie Wright, IFF flavorist

Photo courtesy of IFF.

## Green Tea Profiles

“The ever-present health and wellness trend has infused every product type across the [United States],” says Nappen. “Tea itself blends beautifully with this platform because people already think of tea as healthy. People have an understanding of the antioxidant capabilities within tea.”

“Green tea sells itself because of its health benefit,” says Wright, “but sometimes that brothy note can be distracting. Green tea is complex because you have both the Chinese green tea and Japanese green teas,” she says. “The processing is different—the Japanese varieties are steamed rather than pan-fired—resulting in a different profile.” Wright explains that, generally, the most favorable variety is the Dragon Well/Long Jing type, which is pan-fired. Among Japanese varieties, the premium gyokuro stands out due to its strong umami and brothy notes. “That’s a very unusual tea in that it’s grown in shade [typically using bamboo screens] to produce a lot of chlorophyll,” she says. Yulu, a Chinese gyokuro variety is also something the IFF team is investigating.

## Oolong: the Champagne of Teas

Oolong is processed from the *Camellia sinensis* plant, which also produces white, green and black tea. This “champagne of tea” is not as fully oxidized as black tea and is, in Wright’s words, exceptional in its taste. “They have delicate and floral notes—unbelievable,” she says. “Some of them taste like honeysuckle. Recently we tasted a honey phoenix [or “honey dancong”] varietal and it was incredible.” This varietal is often described as having a sweet honey—or even orchidlike—aroma and flavor. “We’ve become very excited about the possibilities of oolong varietals because I think consumers are really going to love them.”

## Emerging Teas

“Darjeeling is a beautiful tea,” says Wright. “It is the least processed and most delicate-tasting of the black teas.” The IFF team is also looking at florals such as jasmine green tea. In addition, the group is keeping an eye on non-teas such as matte and South African rooibos, both of which boast novel taste profiles and perceived health benefits.

## Applications

Nappen explains that flavor applications are often dictated by each tea’s strength and character. “When you’re talking about a delicate flavored water or something that is lightly sweetened or carbonated, the nuances of a white tea complement the system,” he says. “But when you consider confections you may need more of the fullness and richness of an oolong or black tea.”



Ed Nappen, technical category director for beverages

Photo courtesy of IFF.

He notes that green teas lend themselves to ice cream applications. “Processing is more important than the varietal of the leaf, which gives you the final complexity of flavor. IFF is focusing on understanding these processes and how to manipulate the leaves to produce profiles ideal for multiple end-uses.”

## Flavor Creation Process: Reaching for 95-5


Wright and her team developed a range of tea flavors based on tea captives produced by the R&D team. “For Darjeeling, three different ways of extracting the leaf provide three different profiles,” says Wright. “We can utilize these along with Generessence® topnotes to deliver natural-tasting flavors.”

“We’re very mindful of the legislative changes in Europe. We have a significant opportunity to deliver flavors that satisfy the 95-5 legislation for naturals that will become European law,” she adds.

## Where Tea is Going

“We’re seeing an increase in iced tea offerings, not only in black, but also in green, white and rooibos teas,” says Nappen. Trends show the incorporation of jasmine and chrysanthemum into iced tea beverages. Nappen believes that tea flavors will further diversify and grow more complex as consumers become more familiar with the range of varietals. “Once people become more educated about tea, they’ll understand the differences between silver needle and white peony tea. They’ll appreciate the differences between the great selection of flavor profiles. This education process is just beginning and is more exciting than what’s happening in coffee.”

Reported by Jeb Gleason-Allured, Editor; [jallured@allured.com](mailto:jallured@allured.com)

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