

STORIES.
ART.
DESIGN.
ISSUE NO. 26:
GREEN

SAD

FLASHING LIGHTS
possible UFO sightings

URBAN FARMS
Vancouver's most
productive green spaces

THE HILLS ARE ALIVE
can plants feel?



\$14.99 CDN
PRINTED
IN CANADA



TREASURE GREEN

Precious blends at one of Vancouver's oldest tea shops

WORDS BY ASHLEY LINKLETTER PHOTOGRAPHY BY ROBYN HUMPHREYS

The first thing I notice when I walk into the Treasure Green Tea Company is owner Olivia Cheung's laugh. Her laugh is bright and infectious, and it's difficult not to mirror her smile when she speaks. I sit down at the tea bar and she makes me cup after cup of jasmine tea, each cup getting stronger and more pronounced as the tea leaves uncurl. This is how you know tea leaves have been completely brewed, she tells me: they evolve from dried and tightly coiled leaves into straight fronds that look like softly waving seagrass. Watching Olivia make tea is hypnotic—her movements are practiced and sure-footed; it's clear that she's in her element.

The Treasure Green Tea Company, now Vancouver's oldest tea shop, was founded in 1981 by Olivia's father, Mr. Kwok Sun Cheung. Olivia would accompany her father on buying trips to China in order to learn the trade and meet the farmers who grew the tea sold in the shop. After officially taking over the business in 2002, she still travels to China once a year, visiting and buying tea from the same families her father first introduced her to. "I deal now with just family-owned farms, and the nice thing about that is most people are concerned with how clean the tea is: Are there pesticides? Is the soil good enough to grow? [...] This is their bread and butter; they take really good care of their stuff."

When Olivia talks about tea, she uses sensory language, similar to the way a sommelier might describe the terroir of the wine they're drinking. She can identify the region of China the tea is from by taste alone (as well as the soil it was grown in and when it was harvested). This acuity grows from her thorough, hands-on learning and deep understanding of the product. Making tea, on the

other hand, is all about intention. "There is always an intention that's spiritual. When I'm doing anything, there's an intention. There's a target and it's always making a good cup of tea," she says. Even when Olivia's juggling customers and the regular demands of owning a business, the idea of intention is always there. When I ask her how she does it, she laughs and says, "The more you do it, the more focused you get. It becomes very natural to you. There's no more fixated action anymore. It's like water. In other words it's like okay: this tea, this way, this tool; and it's all by feel, so now I can multitask and make tea."

Intentional action is also a way to survive the shifting landscape of Vancouver's Chinatown today, and Olivia isn't afraid to mix things up. "Our business model changed as the demographic changed, and part of it really is my personality. I always enjoy working in a bar environment, meaning bartending, so I like a high table and serving tea this way." She tells me that Treasure Green Tea Company is now hugely popular for those looking for a single to-go cup of regular or premium iced tea—so popular in fact that the latter was (unsurprisingly) voted 2018's best iced tea in Vancouver by the Vancouver Foodster Awards.

As buildings are torn down and condos are built up, it seems as though every other building has become a home to bars, art galleries, and coffee shops—often all but erasing the heritage of the neighbourhood. While some businesses opt to not adapt, Olivia recognizes the need for Treasure Green Tea Company to grow in order to thrive amongst its younger neighbours. It's a daunting task, but Olivia is ready for what may come; she says, "we change with whatever's changing."

