



## **CELEBRATING 23 YEARS & COUNTING!**

- Product:** Premium loose-leaf teas, tisanes, single-serve tea sachets & tea accouterments
- Founders:** Tomislav Podreka & Linda Villano
- Key Individuals:** Chris Villano & Sonam Curreri & Linda Villano
- Launch date:** July 1995
- Location:** 69-73 Plandome Road  
Manhasset, New York 11030
- International:** SerendipiTea-Japan, Osaka
- Website:** [www.SerendipiTea.com](http://www.SerendipiTea.com)
- Phone/Fax:** 888-TEA-LIFE (1-888-832-5433) ~ Fax: 516-365-7733
- E-mail:** [tea@serendipiTea.com](mailto:tea@serendipiTea.com)
- Awards:**
- 2018 World Tea Championships (Seven Awards ~ Iced & Hot Tea)  
Coconutty Nilsson ~ Ginger ~ Jasmine-Scented Green Tea ~ Lili'uokalani ~  
PuErh Golden Tip ~ Red Oz ~ White Peach
  - 2017 Global Tea Championship (Two Awards)  
Cocoa Loco Nut ~ Golden Milk Mix
  - 2016 North American Tea Championship (Two Awards)  
Berry Blueberry ~ HARMONY
  - 2015 North American Tea Championship (Three Awards)  
A Fruit Medley ~ Charlie Chan Cha ~ Ssspicy
  - 2014 World Tea Awards ~ Nominated Best Retail Website
  - 2014 North American Tea Championship (Four Awards)  
Da Hong Pao ~ Passion & Envy ~ Strictly Strawberry ~ Koh Samet Sun
  - 2013 North American Tea Championship (Two Awards)  
Really Goethe ~ Fellini's Folly
  - 2011 Tea House Times Seal of Approval: Excellent Tea & Tea Book
  - 2005 Specialty Coffee Association of America (SCAA) Best New Tea: Certified  
Organic Cha Cha Chai
  - 2004 NASFT Product Awards Competition Finalist - Outstanding Beverage:  
SerendipiTea's Fiji: Papaya, Wild Pineapple & Green Tea
  - 2004 Take Me 2 Tea Expo, 1<sup>st</sup> Place Iced Tea Shake-Off - Best Iced Tea: Green  
Flavored: SerendipiTea's Fiji
  - 2000 Specialty Coffee Association of America (SCAA) Exhibitor Awards 3<sup>rd</sup>  
Place: Best Sustainable, Practices/Product



## SELECT CLIENTS

1 Hotel Central Park (NYC)  
AMAZON.com  
Andaz 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue Hotel (NYC)  
Arnaud's (New Orleans)  
Lucques (CA ~ Chef Suzanne Goin)  
AQUAVIT (NYC ~ Chef Emma Bengtsson)  
Brooklyn Roasting Company (All Locations)  
Bubby's (Japan ~ Three Locations)  
Esca, Lupa Osteria Romana (NYC)  
Blue Hill @ Stone Barns (NY ~ Chef Dan Barber)  
Busena Terrace ~ Maroad (Okinawa, Japan)  
Culinary Institute of America, The (Hyde Park, NY)  
Dean & DeLuca (Gourmet Food Stores)  
Fairway Markets (Bulk)  
Farmhouse at Rogers Gardens (CA)  
Fresh Direct (Tri-State)  
Gotham Bar & Grill (NYC ~ Chef Alfred Portale)  
Hotel Hankyu International ~ Solamente (Osaka, Japan)  
Le Bernardin (NYC ~ Chef Eric Ripert)  
Melisse (CA ~ Chef Josiah Citrin)  
National Press Club, The (Washington, DC)  
North Carolina Museum of Art (Raleigh, NC)  
Rainbow Room, The (NYC)  
Rihga Royal Hotel (Osaka, Japan)  
Rose Establishment, The ~ Salt Lake City, UT  
Southern Season (Chapel Hill, NC)  
Tokyo Station Hotel, The (Tokyo, Japan)  
Urban Serendipity Banjul (Seoul, Korea)  
Westin Miyako ~ Mayfair Tea Room (Kyoto, Japan)  
Windsor Arms (Toronto, Canada)  
Zabar's (NYC – Gourmet Food Store)



**Christopher G. Villano**  
**Majority Partner, SerendipiTea**

Chris Villano was born and raised in New York into a family of restaurateurs & specialty food entrepreneurs. He received a business degree in hospitality from Boston University and worked at several corporate hotels and restaurants while there. He furthered his studies at the Culinary Institute of America (CIA) where he received a degree in Culinary Arts. Chris' culinary and management/operating highlights include taking over as Executive Chef at Solera, the restaurant he had been working at while attending CIA, shortly after graduation. Solera, an Iberian restaurant that served tapas, paella, and other fine European gastronomic goodies had two locations: Manhattan and Westchester.

A few years later, with the help of family and friends, he purchased the famed Mickey Mantle's Restaurant and Sports Bar on Central Park South, NYC. A complete makeover and modernization of the facility along with improved cuisine and service enabled the restaurant to thrive for 10 more years.

In addition, Chris and two business associates responded to a City of New York Request for Proposal (RFP) for a concession and marina development on an abandoned and dilapidated 3-acre parcel of land on the Hudson River in Upper Manhattan. They were awarded the contract and opened La Marina, a waterfront restaurant, bar, lounge, beach, and marina destination that can service up to 3,000 people.

During this same period to date, Chris became involved with several other specialty food-related businesses as an investor, board member, and/or operator. These include: Ciao Imports, a Miami-based specialty food importer and distributor; Really Nice Restaurants which owns/owned several restaurant concepts in Chicago, Atlanta, and California; and SerendipiTea, an award-winning organic specialty tea importer, blender and wholesaler.

In 2018, with over two decades of culinary, operating, management and ownership experience in the restaurant/food & beverage industry Chris moved into the role of majority partner at SerendipiTea with an eye on the future. Noting that the Specialty Tea and the Organic industries are rapidly expanding Chris, while remaining true to the company's founding mission, is steering SerendipiTea toward expansion and wider growth as it nears its 25-year anniversary.



**Linda Villano**  
**Partner/Co-founder, SerendipiTea**

Linda Villano co-founded SerendipiTea in 1995 with Tomislav Podreka. As with many successful ventures, SerendipiTea was an outgrowth of another endeavor, in this case a projected import-export business involving products from Australia. Although she grew up in a family of restaurateurs and chefs, and had an intimate knowledge of the food and beverage businesses, Linda admits that she knew very little about tea at the beginning. Soon, however, tea became a passion and now she oversees all aspects of the business, including client consulting, concept and design, staff training, sourcing and product development. She considers her role as a purveyor of premium loose-leaf teas a natural continuation of family tradition, and her expertise in the restaurant business is a great strength in developing products for, and relationships with, clients.

Prior to founding SerendipiTea, Linda worked extensively in the nonprofit sector in arts and social services. Her experience in the not-for-profit world carries over into SerendipiTea's numerous philanthropic endeavors (on behalf of City Harvest, Island Harvest, WaterAid, National Peace Corps Assn./NPCA, Green America and a myriad of local organizations), its commitment to social and environmental stewardship and the company's philosophy that a business must benefit everyone involved at all levels.

Linda is a published illustrator and writer. Her illustrations appear in Tomislav Podreka's book, *SerendipiTea: a guide to the varieties, origins and rituals of tea*, and she writes articles about tea for trade publications.



**Sonam Curreri**  
**General Manager, SerendipiTea**

Sonam Curreri joined the SerendipiTea family nearly 14 years ago establishing a natural union as tea and tea culture are essential to her identity, a Tibetan woman who grew up in South India. Sonam plays an integral role in the successful operating and steady advancement of the company, often wearing many hats at one time.

After receiving her degree in commerce, Sonam, in pursuit of better opportunities and having been bitten by the travel bug early in life, moved to Kathmandu to join family members in a robust import/export/wholesale/retail business which focused exclusively on Tibetan cultural goods in the heart of the bustling capital of Nepal. After a number of years and several international adventures which stretched from the East to Ibiza to Paris, Sonam moved to NYC, her husband's hometown.

Linguistically gifted, she speaks many languages with ease including English, Tibetan, Hindi, Nepali, some French and, after settling in the USA, Spanish. As head of operations and logistics, Sonam runs the multi-national internal and external workings of SerendipiTea effortlessly switching from one language to another ensuring that communication is fluid and smooth. All this in addition to handling customer service and assisting with tea sourcing and selections, she is a calm marvel of extraordinary competence.



## **CORPORATE PHILOSOPHY**

SerendipiTea aspires to raise respect and consciousness of tea in the United States to a level already enjoyed throughout the world.

- Quality** SerendipiTea is committed to importing and packaging the highest quality loose leaf tea, from fine, organic and biodynamic estates whenever possible, and evaluating every flush and offering prior to selection.
- Expertise** SerendipiTea works closely with some of the most prestigious tea growers and specialists around the world, maintaining up to date expertise in all facets of tea and its production.
- Natural** SerendipiTea uses all natural products at every stage of production. In addition to sourcing tea from organic and biodynamic gardens, all packaging is earth-friendly, using post-consumer recycled and biodegradable materials and water-based inks.
- Direct Trade** SerendipiTea is committed to establishing lasting relationships with gardens, selecting locations for quality as well as for fair treatment of the farmers and laborers.
- Artisan** SerendipiTea, employs people and not machines, for handcrafted, rather than machine milled teas. All packing and blending is done by hand in their NY facility.
- Education** SerendipiTea conducts extensive lectures for the trade, as well as seminars and tastings for the public.
- Full Service** SerendipiTea offers retail, wholesale, bulk, private label and food service programs. Staff is always available to answer questions from consumers.
- Innovation** SerendipiTea is constantly experimenting with the development of new blends and products. The company believes that experimentation keeps tradition alive and evolving.
- T-sachets** SerendipiTea believes that the small effort of brewing loose tea produces an immeasurably better experience and provides a moment of focus often lacking in our day. However, for those in the Food Service arena seeking a responsible T-sachet option, SerendipiTea offers a variety of single serve T-sachets (made from plant-based material) which contain the very same tea & tisane used in its Bulk program. No compromise, only the exact quality, creativity and consistency of tea and taste that SerendipiTea has been providing since 1995.

## The facets of SerendipiTea are:



### **The Cup**

Tea, philosophy,  
the art of reflection or thinking

### **The Pen**

Arts and education,  
the pursuit of knowledge and aesthetics

### **The Hand**

Charity and hope,  
support of non-profit organizations and their noble efforts

### **Serendipity**

Accidental sagacity; the faculty of making fortunate discoveries of things you were not seeking

The term is derived from *Serendib*, an old name for the island of Sri Lanka. Coined by English writer Horace Walpole in 1754, the term refers to the heroes of a fairy tale, The Three Princes of Serendip, who wandered freely and were forever “making discoveries by accidents and sagacity of things they were not in quest of.”



## **TEA VARIETIES EXPLAINED**

**ALL TEA** is withered after picking. Withering is the process by which water evaporates from the leaf, making it more flexible and easier to shape.

**WHITE TEA** is made from unopened buds that are withered and bake-dried immediately after harvest. There is minimal oxidation, as the leaves are not rolled or tossed to release the enzymes that initiate the process. White tea is very delicately flavored and nearly colorless in the cup.

**GREEN TEA** is steamed immediately after picking to neutralize the active enzymes. The leaf is then withered and shaped to achieve the desired leaf finish (long needle shapes, rolled pellets, etc.), then steamed again or pan fired. Because there has been no oxidation, the tea remains green.

**OO LONG TEA** is not steamed, as the enzymes must remain active. Leaves are basket tossed after withering to bruise the edges thus exposing the enzymes to oxygen, initiating partial oxidation. After 15% to 75% oxidation occurs, the leaf is heated to stop the process. Partial oxidation results in complex floral aromas and flavors ranging from delicate and nutty to honey and molasses for example. There are many varieties of Oolong, most of which come from China and Taiwan.

**BLACK TEA** is the most popular style of tea in western countries. Leaves are roll-broken after withering, cracking the surface of the leaf exposing more of the enzymes to air and initiating fuller oxidation. Complete oxidation results in a dark, richly colored drink. The leaf is then finished with forced hot air. The most famous and prestigious black teas are from India (Darjeeling and Assam), China, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Kenya, while Vietnam and Thailand produce fine examples.

**PU-ERH** or Dark Tea can be made from black or green tea & can be loose or compressed. The finished tea leaves are aged in climate and humidity controlled rooms. Moisture is added to the dry leaves which are regularly turned & tended. During this “composting” procedure helpful bacteria growth is encouraged. Pu-erh is from Yunnan, China.

**SCENTED AND FLAVORED TEAS** have the added aromas or flavors of fruits, flowers or herbs, and can be made with any of the above teas. Scented tea is packed with layers of flowers, such as jasmine or roses, to absorb their scent. Once this process is complete, the flowers are discarded, although dried flower petals are sometimes added later for appearance. Flavored tea is tossed with small amounts of fruit oil that imparts flavor to the leaves. Earl Grey tea, black tea flavored with oil of bergamot (a citrus fruit), is the most famous example. SerendipiTea uses only natural fruit oils (the Earl Grey is made with organic bergamot oil) in flavored tea. Some teas are flavored by the addition of dried herbs and spices such as mint, cinnamon or cloves. Masala Chai is the best known example.

**TISANES** (Infusions) are herbal, floral, fruit or spice “teas” that do not contain tea. Rooibos (South African “red tea”), chamomile and mint are popular examples. Most tisanes are naturally caffeine free. However, some herbs have stimulant properties. Yerba Mate, although a tisane, contains matteine, which can provide quite a jolt.





## WHAT IS TEA?

**ALL TEA** comes from ONE plant, *Camellia Sinensis*, however there are a great many varieties or cultivars of this plant. Strictly speaking, beverages made from any other botanical (herbs, fruit, flowers, roots, barks, etc.) are not tea, but *tisane*.

The color and flavor of the tea depends on numerous factors including the type of tea plant used and the degree of oxidation that takes place as the tea is processed. Oxidation occurs when enzymes in the leaves are exposed to air, causing the leaves to change color and flavors to develop. Oxidation is sometimes, incorrectly, called fermentation.

Another factor in determining the character of tea is where it is grown, *terroir*. Although *camellia sinensis* can grow anywhere, it only produces tea of acceptable quality in tropical or subtropical climates, with adequate rainfall, and at an altitude of one to seven thousand feet above sea level. Variations in altitude, soil composition, rainfall and exposure to sun all play a part in the characteristics of the final product.

With very rare exceptions, all tea is cultivated, not harvested in the wild. Tea originated in the mountains of China and was successfully transplanted to the mountain regions of India, Japan, Thailand, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and the Southeast Asia and Kenya. Like wine, tea is very sensitive to the soils in which it grows and, also as with wine grapes, many varieties and hybrids have been developed over the centuries. Just as there are single vineyard wines, there are single garden teas that can command very high prices. Each culture that produces tea has developed its own traditions of processing the leaves, resulting in a huge variety of styles and sub-styles.

When tea became popular in Europe, merchants invented their own names for their products. Thus Assam tea became known as Irish Breakfast and Keemun became known as English Breakfast. In addition, a system for designating quality was developed. In general, the best teas are those with leaves that have been left intact, and the gradations reflect this. Whole leaves take longer to infuse into hot water, creating a fuller, more complex flavor before the unpleasant, bitter tannin in the leaf dissolves into the water. Smaller leaf fragments color the water faster, but they release their tannin faster, as well. Merchants use letters to indicate the grades of tea, which include, in ascending order:

- Dust (D) – the lowest grade, this is the powdery residue at the bottom of a crate of tea
- Fannings (F) – tiny broken leaf fragments. It is an unfortunate fact that dust and fannings are the two grades in most teabags
- Cut Torn and Curled (CTC) – refers to a mechanical process that creates a standardized product
- Pekoe (P) – whole leaf tea of high quality (often used misleadingly on teabags)
- Orange Pekoe (OP) – a higher grade. It is not orange in color, nor orange flavored, but was named by Dutch merchants for the Royal family of the Netherlands, the House of Orange, to denote the highest quality
- An elaborate system of initials indicates further grades of Pekoe. These will sometimes appear on labels to assure the buyer of quality. In general, the more initials, the more rarified the tea, as long as the final letter is P for Pekoe. For example Darjeeling SFTGFOP is very good tea, indeed.



## HISTORY

- The custom of drinking tea developed in China almost 5,000 years ago
- Tea came to Europe overland from the East (by way of the Ottoman Empire and Russia) and the West (with European merchants) in the 17<sup>th</sup> century
- The first public sale of tea in London was in 1657
- The custom of adding milk to tea developed because teacups used to be made of faïence, a delicate material that would break if the tea were too hot. Putting a little cold milk in the bottom of the cup preserved the family china
- Contrary to popular belief, iced tea was not invented at the St Louis World Fair in 1904. Recipes for cold tea beverages go back at least as far as the early 19<sup>th</sup> century

## HEALTH

- Although tea contains more caffeine by weight than coffee, a pound of coffee makes only about forty cups, whereas a pound of tea will make as many as two hundred. So a cup of tea will contain far less caffeine than a cup of coffee
- Research suggests that tea is a potent anti-oxidant
- Tea is a natural source of fluoride and can help prevent tooth decay
- Tea is also thought to be a valuable element in reducing cholesterol

## HOW TO

- The best water for making tea is the water that tastes best in the glass. Filtered water is preferable to distilled water, as dissolved oxygen gives a better flavor
- Steep black tea for about 5 minutes, oolong and green tea for about 3 minutes, however the exact timing is a matter of personal taste
- Black tea leaves may become too tannic but can certainly be re-steeped to personal taste. White, Green, Oolong and PuErh leaves can be re-steeped several to many times if so desired.



SerendipiTea was founded in 1995, on a set of principles that have guided the company for more than twenty years. These include the import and manufacturing of the highest quality loose leaf teas and botanicals; a commitment to environmentally and socially responsible practices, from organic and biodynamic products, to recycled, sustainable and biodegradable packaging; educating the trade and public and raising respect and awareness of tea to the level it enjoys in other countries.

The name SerendipiTea comes from the word “serendipity,” meaning an inadvertent, but felicitous discovery. It is an appropriate name for a company that developed serendipitously. Founded by Tomislav Podreka and Linda Villano in their fifth floor, walk-up apartment on Manhattan’s Upper West Side, the company now provides tea to an ever growing number of prestigious national and international clients.

Tomislav’s knowledge of tea was matched by Linda’s knowledge of, and family connections in, the food industry, and their first clients were restaurants to which they could sell in bulk, avoiding the expense of retail packaging. At the time, few chefs or restaurateurs knew much about tea and gave little thought to what they served. Almost all relied on teabags for convenience. SerendipiTea, however, was dedicated to demonstrating that loose leaves make an immeasurably better cup of tea. Tomislav started teaching in culinary schools in order to reach the next generation of chefs and restaurateurs and to this day, students from his classes call SerendipiTea when developing their tea menus.

SerendipiTea grew quickly. By 1997, they had added a retail line, outgrown the apartment and moved to Southwestern Connecticut for more space. Only three years later, the delivery load made a return to New York necessary, and they moved into a storefront/warehouse in Long Island City. By 2006, that space had been expanded and was soon no longer able to contain the business. SerendipiTea built a new home in Manhasset, LI that accommodates their administrative and production facilities (certified Organic by QAI and certified Kosher by Star-K), and a retail space/showroom.

Now headed by Christopher, Linda and Sonam, and offering nearly three hundred products, SerendipiTea remains committed to its original principles as it continues to thrive in its third decade. Seventy percent of the business remains bulk sales, with the remainder divided between retail and direct sales via their website.