



# A Bold Blend

By Lynn Tangorra

Through display organization, industry knowledge and customer-crafted products, one tea shop finds a way to engage tea aficionados of all generations.

**A**dagio Teas does a lot of its business online, but at one of its stores in Naperville, Illinois, the company creates an experience any retailer can learn from.

Merchandising is very intentional, with everything having its place.

The teas are all separated by type and color-coded for an easy consumer visual. Herbals are in yellow packaging, white teas can be found in a light green color; green teas are packaged in green; and black and oolongs are in brown packages.

All loose tea is located on the top row with tea bags on the bottom rows.

Customers are not limited to sampling just what the store has out at that time; they can sample whatever they like off the shelves.

"If they are curious about what something tastes like, there is no limit to what they can try," says Laura Sabato, store manager.

Customers can see and smell the products by opening the sample jars of loose leaf tea.

Made of Corian, the shop counters are meant to get messy, a place where customers can sample and even spill the teas.

## Cup of Knowledge

For those wanting to learn more about the tea industry, the shop has private tea sessions available with its tea experts.

To become a tea expert, these employees go through rigorous training, have to take a tea class and pass certain tests.

"There is [also] ongoing training where

corporate will mail us unlabeled teas every week that we have to identify by taste," Sabato says. "Then we have to name the country of origin and what other teas we would compare it to. We have to know what our teas are."

At each private session, guests are given a flight of tea to try.

"If there's a party of four, then you get to try four different teas," Sabato explains.

A Tea 101 class helps attendees understand where the tea comes from, how the leaves are graded, how they are harvested and what the difference is among all the teas.

## Quality Brew

Adagio Teas is constantly evaluating its products. The company directly sources its tea from farms, a decision made after the company felt it was not getting the best possible product.

"We used to source from third-party wholesalers, but the teas we were getting were not very fresh, there wasn't much variety and they were older," Sabato says. "We decided to go directly to the source. It's direct trade, that way we pay the prices that the farms want, the tea is fresher, and there is no middle man. It's also more reasonably priced for the consumer."

Known for its loose leaf tea, the store also carries pyramid tea bags for those who are looking for more convenience.

## Mature Millennials

Sabato says the shop appeals to people of all demographics, but they do have something special that appeals specifically to Millennials.

"We have something called fandom blends, which are geared toward the younger demographic and created by that age group," she says.

Anyone can go online and create a custom blend, choose its name and create the image that goes on the tea container.

A majority of the blends are created based on popular TV series and characters from the shows, like "New Girl", "Game of Thrones" and "Downton Abbey."

Let's say you like a certain character from a TV show, "That character is kind of funny, but there's also a bit of a unique character to them; there's an edge," Sabato explains, "So I might want to pick a tea that's a little bit spicy, but there's a little bit of a sweet side to them, so I will pick a sweet fruit."

The tea can then be purchased through the website and the blend is stored in the customer's account so they can always repurchase the tea.

The blend can be made public or private. If it becomes popular, then the blend can be purchased directly from the retail store.

This has proven to be a creative way to attract Millennials, since the teas are created by Millennials and are popular within that age group.

The fandom blends, however, are not the only products getting this age group excited.

"Millennials are really attracted to traditional tea also," Sabato says.

What does your retail store do to attract Millennials? How about to share industry knowledge and make your shop more visually engaging? **LGR**

