

Down the Rabbit Hole

TEA BAR SERVES AUTHENTIC BUBBLE TEA

AND TRADITIONAL CHINESE TEAS By Amy Schneider



CRYSTAL ZHAO, LEFT, AND SHUANG HAN

PHOTO BY TRASK BEDORTHA

Bubble tea is the coffee of Taiwan. That's why Shuang Han and Crystal Zhao, owners of The Rabbit Hole Tea Bar, decided to open shop last year and bring the authentic Taiwanese bubble tea experience, as well as other kinds of tea, to Eugene. Real bubble tea is a rarity in the U.S., they say.

"You see a lot of restaurants have bubble tea, but it's totally different than what good bubble tea is," Han explains. "The main thing is we use real tea, not water and powder. It takes a certain technique."

For the uninitiated, bubble tea is a drink invented in Taiwan that features sweet, milky tea with large tapioca pearls called boba that sit at the bottom of the cup. Giant straws, a signature of bubble tea, allow the drinker to slurp up the chewy boba while savoring the distinctive flavor of the tea.

"There's no way I can explain what bubble tea tastes like because it's just such a unique flavor," Zhao says. "You have to try it. It's our signature thing."

Han and Zhao, both from China, opened their tea bar almost a year ago — they graduated from the University of Oregon with business degrees and decided to put their degrees to use as purveyors of Chinese and Taiwanese teas.

Secreted away near Brails and Safeway, the tea bar is a cozy nook with wood countertops, ample seating and a warm atmosphere.

Rabbit Hole offers a wonderfully rich menu, with a selection of traditional Chinese teas served in dainty cups. The Dragon Well green tea tastes earthy and familiar, especially when taken in small sips.

Teas with a Western bent include Earl Gray and raspberry black, offered hot, iced or blended. Han and Zhao say each drink is made to order, and customers can choose how much sugar and ice they want.

Rabbit Hole also provides toppings outside the realm of boba — red beans, egg pudding and coffee jelly are all on the table.

Zhao says that when she and Han constructed the menu, they chose to offer familiar Western drinks as well as teas that invite Eugeneans to experience new flavors. They special order ingredients from Taiwan to ensure an authentic taste.

In addition to being a "rabbit hole" or hideaway for tea lovers, Rabbit Hole is named after Han's rabbit, Jake. With adorable black-and-white markings, Jake features in the tea bar's logo.

To celebrate a full year of business this September, Zhao and Han say they plan to offer a rewards program, change up the menu and perhaps throw a party. And who knows, Han says — maybe Jake the rabbit will make a special appearance. ■

The Rabbit Hole Tea Bar is at 240 E. 17th Ave. and is open 1 to 6 pm during the summer, with extended hours in the winter. See its Facebook page for more info.

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