

Unroasted Wuyi Oolong Tea

Harvest: Machine
harvested, small batch,
Winter 2015

Region: Songbolin,
Taiwan
Elevation: 700m

Batch Size: Very small
Light Oxidation. Medium
Unroasted

*Flavor: Heady, floral aroma. Herbal, fresh green, vibrant character.
Delicate, complex, refreshing finish.*

THE UNIQUE CHARACTER OF THIS BATCH OF TEA

Since the tea club began in December, we've shared distinct batches of roasted teas to suit the winter season. Now, for the month of March, we feel it's time to share a tea that is a prelude to spring. This batch of tea comes from the first proper harvest of a newly planted plot of heirloom Wuyi Oolong. This crop has been cultivated organically. Out of the original 2000 saplings that were planted, 1000 survived, and the others were replanted. The Wuyi Oolong strain produces less leaves than all the currently cultivated strains. This is why it was phased out of production some 40 years ago in the historical tea growing area of Songbolin.

Our main source of tea from this region decided to be adventurous by planting a crop of tea that all but vanished from local farms decades ago. Inheriting a tradition, our friend has an indebted interest in preserving his local culture. Not only does this strain of Oolong have roots in Songbolin, Taiwan, it is perhaps the most renowned place name in mainland China — Wuyi Mountain, for Chinese Oolong tea. Wuyi is noted for

its complex floral character that stimulates the senses with a delicate, balanced profile of flavor and aroma. It's one of those teas that is astounding in the sense that such subtle complexity of aroma and flavor can be crafted from the leaves of a tree!

The fact that a major player in the local industry finds it worthwhile to plant a very small plot of an heirloom strain of tea and cultivate it organically is a prime example of what inspires us to represent the local industry. We feel proud and privileged to be able to share this initial harvest of Wuyi Oolong with you for two main reasons. First, it is a traditional specialty that has become extremely rare in Taiwan. Second, this farmer has committed to growing it organically. It is a deliberate representation of a specialty tea that was grown here before this region developed into large scale tea production. This is sustainable tea production of a traditional local specialty that is unique to this region. We have been lucky enough to watch this happen successfully in the last three years.

We visited the farm when the plants

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were just a few months old. We saw the vision our friend shared with us when the tiny saplings were struggling to survive the summer heat. We were moved by his commitment to invest in a risky project with the goal of producing a unique specialty tea. Half of the initial crop perished in the first year and were replanted. But it was evident from the start that this was an opportunistic challenge that our friend was inspired to take on as a labor of love. It's a small plot of land that he and his partner decided to experiment with. Now, at three years old, the plants are yielding a fine leaf from young trees. This initial harvest produced a mere 35kg of tea leaves. This will probably double as the plants reach maturity, but not much more. They plan to only harvest 3 times a year, making an annual yield that is a small fraction of what is produced by other strains of conventionally farmed tea that are harvested 5-6 times annually.

In our conversations about the project and this batch of tea, we learned that there was a preliminary harvest last spring. Before the plants were to be pruned for the first time in preparation for the initial harvest, the farmer,

alongside his mom, wife and brother hand-picked the new spring growth from the 2-year-old trees. This amounted to less than 10kg of tea leaves. When we asked if any of this batch was still available, our friend replied saying that he had intended to keep this batch to age, and become a memoir of the project. We couldn't help feeling a tad guilty for asking. He went on to say that aged tea is a matter of destiny. If its meant to stay, it'll stay. But tea is not to be hoarded. We were silenced by his words. And so we are able to offer a few brews-worth of this preliminary batch of spring tea with you as our surprise gift, along with the recent winter harvest.

We'd love to hear about your experience in comparing the two batches. So please share comments, photos, better yet — videos of your live tea tastings!