



Tea-time tradition gains popularity once again

By **Connie L. Sheehan**
Staff Reporter

In today's world of suburban shopping malls and fast food, it's hard to believe that once upon a time, women dressed up in their finest hats, gloves and suits for a day downtown.

There, they spent the entire day shopping in just one department store and ended the day over a relaxing cup of tea instead of a cocktail.

Well, at least part of that tradition still survives in downtown Chicago. Some of Chicago's finest hotels serve "high tea" during weekday afternoons.

Although tea is considered a British tradition, the afternoon tea is catching on across the United States, according to Rebecca Corretti, manager of The Greenhouse commons of the Ritz-Carlton Chicago.

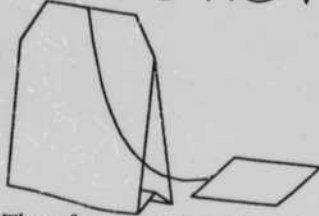
Corretti said the Chicago hotel has been serving the 3 p.m. tea since its opening about 11 years ago, but the Ritz tea first started in the Paris hotel.

Caesar Ritz started serving tea in

his Paris hotel and eventually the concept moved throughout his chain, Corretti said.

In New York, the other hotels saw how successfully the Ritz afternoon tea attracted customers, Corretti said, and the idea spread.

tea review



The afternoon tea attracts a lot of shoppers during the Christmas season, she said, but in January when the shopping season slows, business people stop in.

Today, tea-time attracts both men and women, Corretti said. More and more businessmen are coming in to talk office over tea instead of over cocktails, she said.

Corretti said her staff receives basic training in the art of serving and pouring tea.

The Americans usually like their tea poured, while the Europeans would rather pour it themselves, she said, because Americans like to be pampered. The server must remember to ask for the customer's preference.

The Greenhouse commons offers eight blends of tea, she said, including Earl Grey, Ceylon, herbal and spice.

Our group decided the \$5.50 tea and scone selection would not put a drastic dent in our travel budget. This price includes two fresh scones (similar to a baking powder biscuit) with black currants, whipped butter and strawberry jam, plus an individual pot of our favorite tea.

The \$7 light tea and the \$11 full tea include scones in addition to an extensive selection of elaborate sweets. The young girls at the table next to us spent more time playing with their cream-puff swans than drinking tea.

The sweets are baked at the hotel which ensures the freshest possible products, Corretti said.

Like days gone by, we decided

to dress up for the occasion since none of us had the opportunity to partake in afternoon tea before. But for those who decide to stop in after shopping, slacks and comfortable shoes are common attire.

The Greenhouse commons area is filled mainly with overstuffed couches and comfortable high-backed chairs that we eagerly sank into after walking all day in dress shoes.

Large potted plants keep each

sitting area private. The ceiling consists of greenhouse-type glass panels which make the room airy and light in addition to providing a great view of the Chicago skyline which towers overhead.

The long coffee tables nestled among the couches already are set with tea cups and linen napkins. All one needs to do is choose his or her favorite blend of tea and settle in for a taste of the Ritz-Carlton tradition.

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