

Tea, fizzy drinks steal the food show

OTHER HOT ITEMS: HONEY AND SPECIALTY CHOCOLATES

By Susan Steade

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Expected the oink, got the oolong.

Given the ubiquity of bacon these days, one might have predicted a veritable porkfest at this week's Fancy Food Show in San Francisco. But Babe was put in a corner by tea: venerable British tea, upstart New World tea, tea blossoms, tea chocolate, tea marshmallows, tea cocktails, tea cookies (yes, Biscottea).

At the Moscone Center trade exhibition of the latest in specialty foods — snacks, drinks, desserts, condiments, involving little or no preparation — tea was just one of the stand-out trends and products. Among others:

Sophisticated sodas. Jockeying for position in the segment of not-too-sweet sodas are Fizzy Lizzy, Grown-Up Soda, Dry Soda and Essn, with flavors including rhubarb, juniper, vanilla bean and Meyer lemon. Napa's Vignette has staked out its own niche: sodas made from wine grapes.

Thinking pink are Ooba hibiscus drinks from Dublin (the Alameda County one) and Sence Rose Nectar. Sun Tropics, in San Ramon, has a sparkling calamansi limeade.

Utah's Apple Beer was pouring its surprisingly dry, tart soda as well as Barrel Brothers Root Beer. And taking the prizes for longevity and eye-catching packaging was 100-year-old Fentimans, which has come across the pond with botanically brewed drinks in Victorian bottles: ginger beer, shandy, dandelion-

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burdock and other traditional libations.

Chocolate. Terroir isn't just for wine anymore. Single-origin chocolates are the specialties of chocolatiers including Chuao (Venezuela), Claudio Corallo (Sao Tome and Principe) and Santander (Colombia). Berkeley's Scharffen Berger was presenting its Brazilian single-origin, and Vosges Haut-Chocolat has two new organic single-origins, dark and milk, from the Dominican Republic, as well as an organic 66 percent cacao bar with mushrooms.

Other candies. Lucky Country and Kookaburra both presented gourmet licorice from Australia, but Minnesota's Route 29 had them beat on charm with retro-hip tubs of licorice pigs, licorice reindeer, peppermint bark and caramels of all sorts.

Nuts. You can't deny the historical appeal of Milwaukee's Buddy Squirrel (1916) and Texas' Squirrel Brand (1888), but inroads are still being made in the world of nuts: Napa chocolate maker Anette's sells beer brittle and wine brittle.

Flavorings. Sonoma Syrup Co. has 15 infused simple syrups, including lavender, lime, white ginger and pomegranate chocolate. From the Seattle area come Essential Cane's flavored sugars and flavored sea salts from SaltWorks and Sea Salt Superstore.

Gadgets. What appeared to be a cluster of holdovers

from the Macworld show was watching the demonstration of the Volcano Vaporization System (\$560). The literature strongly suggests it is a smoke-free cannabis-delivery device, but it was presented as a way to infuse foods with flavors, a la Grant Achatz.

How's that again? Valentine's latkes, from Linda's Gourmet Latkes of Los Angeles. Humane foie gras, from New York's Hudson Valley. Boxed water, from Glacia IceBox.

Gluten-free. Huge in cookbooks these days, the trend was little in evidence at the show. Edna's from Mountain View has some gluten-free cookies; other bakers included WOW Baking, Gluten-Free Gourmet and Pamela's.

Local interest. One South Bay standout was Los Gatos' Silver Moon Desserts, which makes liqueur-infused ice creams and sorbets, such as lavender limoncello and praline Irish cream. Retailers include Gene's Fine Foods in Saratoga and Zanotto's in San Jose's Rose Garden neighborhood.

Up-and-coming. Bee Raw's varietals (sage, sourwood, wild raspberry) made a strong case for honey as the next big thing. No. 2 prediction: figs.

And finally: bacon. It was around, but you had to look for it: in Vosges' bacon chocolate bar, in Bacon-Salt's new Baconnaise and in the best gimmicky giveaway of the show, bacon lip balm.