

ATLAS

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INSPIRED INFUSIONS

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Samovar Tea founder Jesse Jacobs scoops some matcha green tea powder with a spoon, then levels it flat. He drops the matcha into a small bowl, stirring hot water into the powder with a bamboo whisk. His movements are brisk, yet calm and precise, indicative of his strong and soothing presence. Once he decides that the texture of the bright green broth is just right, he pours the concoction into a small cup. It's thick and foamy, with a distinct grassy flavor.

Jacobs' tea bar, on San Francisco's boutique-lined Valencia Street, is cloaked in a wash of white outside and in. Slabs of heavy stone and refinished timber serve as seating. "This was designed to be based on the concept of a traditional Japanese tea house," Jacobs says. "Its sole purpose was to remove all distractions. What they would do is put one flower and a pot of tea in a room, and that would attract your attention, stimulate all of your senses, and become a total focal point for conversation and becoming present. The whole idea was: in emptiness, there is power."

The tea bar's clean and minimal design is an extension of Jacobs' original intention when he first opened up Samovar in 2002. In his previous position as a business analyst, Jacobs was deep in the trenches of the dot-com boom. The idea of taking time to log off and engage in the act of conscious connecting led Jacobs to tea.

"We're in this state of perpetual cognitive overload, where our brains are exploding with too much data, information, and distractions," he says. "And what we really want is a state of cognitive surplus. Anything we can do that will put us in that state of cognitive surplus—slow, calm, relaxation, focus—anything that can put us there, life gets better. We get more done. We're happier and healthier. And so as it turns out, tea is associated with that."

Jacobs wanted to highlight the sensory experience of tea: watching the infusion, getting the distinct spicy aroma of a masala chai, feeling the weight of a rough ceramic tea mug in hand.

Samovar tea bar has six tall, clear glass vessels called tea crucibles

which are used to brew each cup of tea individually. Tablets are synched with each crucible, calibrating time and temperature. The type of tea, the precise weight of measured tea leaves, and the amount of pressure used for extraction all factor into the specific temperature and volume of water used to craft each cup. When the brewing process is activated, hot water shoots to the top of the crucible, causing the tiny leaves to dance around. This allows all the surface area of the tea leaves to be exposed, extracting more flavor.

Jacobs is diligently devoted to his mission to transform the tea ritual from an exacting and elaborate performance into an accessible daily habit, as part of his pursuit to find the antidote to distraction. It's a mixture of focus, relaxation, and simplicity.

"To do 'simple,' it doesn't mean simplistic," Jacobs explains. "Simple means stripping away everything that's not necessary and it takes a lot of effort to figure out, well, what is necessary and what isn't. You have to consider everything."