



Our cups runneth over

Café culture is flourishing in Penzance and we're hardly able to keep up with all the great places there are to graze, sip and sup in.

The freshly opened **Mr Billy's** is a tea or coffee lover's Shangri-La. Venture inside and you enter a world where the phrase 'fancy a brew?' could potentially translate into infinite permutations of ingredients, preparations and preferences. But if you just want a simple cuppa, the connoisseurial complexity isn't forced upon you, rather, it's there if you're interested. And if you are interested, Mr Billy's currently carries 42 kinds of leaf teas and 17 kinds of coffees – all of which can be purchased in any quantity to take home, but can also be served at your table. That's right, every one of their locally roasted coffee beans can be ground to order and served in an individual cafetiere, and as far as we know, this kind of offering is rare in this country, let alone Penzance.



This should be exciting to any fan of hot beverages. But it doesn't stop there. Each pot of tea ordered arrives accompanied by, among other accoutrements, an egg timer. The purpose of this, the waitress will explain, is to measure the optimum three-minute brewing time. Once precisely brewed, the leaves are removed from the pot, in their little straining bucket, and set aside. Having enjoyed your first cup, the remains of the brew is discarded, fresh hot water is fetched and the leaves are re-immersed for a second, perfectly fresh cup. You're even encouraged to take the used leaves away with you, to protract your enjoyment at home, and this makes the price of a pot exceptionally good value.

We thought tea ceremony was the preserve of Japanese culture, but it's all going on right here in West Cornwall. And for real tea heads,

another fact we learned is that Green teas must be made with water heated to just 80 degrees Celsius, so as not to burn the leaf and incite bitterness. Of course, Mr Billy's have an urn that heats to exactly that temperature. All such information is yours for the asking, making it an educational experience as much as a pleasurable one. Also for sale are an array of the best brewing, straining and serving devices on the market, along with a tasteful selection of related gifts and food products.

The full tea menu is far too comprehensive to relay here, but in addition to the ones you may have already come across or have in your own kitchen cupboard, some standout varieties (if only for the allure of their names) include *Puerh Tea cakes*, *Russian Caravan* and *Georgian Old Lady*. Fresh mint tea and Chai teas are also available.

Coffee beans are a seasonal product, so supply fluctuates, but quality and variety are always assured. We're fans of the *Black Chough* blend by *Hands-on Coffee* in Wadebridge, who have developed the *Mr Billy's Blend* especially for the cafe.



To others who know of the owners, this kind of dedication to leaf and bean should come as no surprise, as Nigel and Heather Parry are the founders of *Dishotay*, the tiny shop at the top of Chapel Street that traded as a pure retailer of fine loose leaf tea and freshly roasted coffee. Having been regular Dishotay customers ourselves, we expected great things of the new enterprise, and the new café venture with Steve and Janet Mitchell is the natural culmination and of the couples' years of experience and knowledge. Nigel and Heather are seasoned caterers having previously run *Billy's Café* and the *Beach* in Sennen. And now, once again, they get to practice what they preach by expertly preparing and serving the speciality products they sell.

Also on the menu of the expanded enterprise are homemade cakes and some enticing lunch offerings. We tried a number of savoury dishes, with the 'food envy' award of the table going to the steak sandwich, with its strips of perfectly tender Trevarthan steak. We also shared a cracking cream tea with homemade scones, and an apricot and date crumble slice. On the quality of the food alone the place is to be highly recommended, but put this together with the

liquid refreshments, and you're faced with a seriously appetising proposition.

The emphasis is on local and fresh, which is always a commendable principle. In fact, the Parrys have had strong links with local suppliers for many years: *Origin* and *Hands-on* for their coffee, and *Tregothnan* for their teas. And now they use nearby small producers like *Trevarthan* for their meat, and as we're talking, Joe 'the salad guy' delivers tomorrow's leaves.

Inside, the cafe is taking on an distinct Art Deco theme, but there's also an eclectic mix of other decorative items including Chinoiserie cabinets and reclaimed local signage. The interior space is deceptively large: from the window at the front the floorplate widens to a roomy bar and seating area at the rear. This means that the obvious street presence is limited, but we guarantee that word of mouth will work its magic to boost custom. Good places will be sought out wherever they are, and those offering the rare and unique will surely lure folk hungry for originalitywww.

www.mrbillys.com
www.dishotay.co.uk



Images © Nik Strangelove
nikstrangelove.com