



Cuppa Tea Company 1 N. Morris St., Richmond 254-8322

Afternoon tea is such a civilized ritual that one could not imagine the server hovering over patrons, waiting for them to leave. And indeed, the 300-year-old custom of afternoon tea has been revived with all its gentility at Cuppa Tea Company, a relatively new enterprise on Morris Street.

Owners Lurline and Allan Wagner offer a variety of "tea services," including traditional Chinese and Japanese teas, Cream tea, Dessert tea and Light Luncheon Tea.

The latter comprises a lovely array of delicate tea sandwiches and scones artfully presented on a two-tiered plate. Samples of the available teas are brought to the table in a box, allowing diners to examine and sniff the loose tea leaves. (No tea bags here!) Both iced and hot teas are brewed to order.

Afternoon tea, for which Wagner suggests allowing two hours, is even more elaborate. It features the same mini-sandwiches and scones served at lunch, along with a third tier of delectable pastries. Unlimited servings of two different types of tea are included. Reservations are suggested for the two seatings for afternoon tea (12 and 3 p.m.), but once you are there, the Wagners encourage you to stay as long as you like.

Allan recounted how a group of guests had recently spent the better part of the afternoon at their table—probably because the serene atmosphere is so conducive to conversation. "We're not in any rush, and we don't want you to be either," he said.

Cuppa Tea Co. has two distinct rooms where visitors can relax with their chosen libation. One is decorated in Oriental style, while the other has decidedly Victorian flourishes. Various "wall words" embody the Wagners' philosophy about enjoying tea: "Tea with friends is an oasis of peace in a busy world," says one, while another reminds you to "Enjoy life sip by sip, not gulp by gulp."