Don Mei, Mei Leaf

From the teas.co.uk wiki

> **At a glance:** Don Mei runs Mei Leaf in London, the UK's biggest Chinese tea retailer and YouTube tea education channel. Why he matters to UK Chinese-tea drinkers.

Last reviewed by the teas.co.uk team in May 2026.

Don Mei is the most recognisable face of premium Chinese tea in the UK, and Mei Leaf is the company that put London on the international tea map. If you've ever scrolled past a YouTube tea video featuring a tall man in a North London tea room talking with the precision of a sommelier and the energy of a TED speaker, you've met Don. The Mei Leaf YouTube channel is the polished British counterpart to America's Jesse Appell and Justin Tai, and the Camden tea house is the closest thing the UK has to a Chinese tea destination retail experience.

This entry covers who Don is, why Mei Leaf matters for British tea drinkers, what to watch and what to ignore, and our take on where Mei Leaf fits in the wider tea landscape.

Who Don Mei is

Don Mei runs Mei Leaf, the Camden Town (London) tea house, retailer, and YouTube channel. The business was founded by his father (Bao Mei) and Don has grown into the public face of the brand, presenting most of the YouTube content. Don's training is real, he's been tasting and grading Chinese tea for years, has direct supplier relationships with named producers, and his palate is as serious as anyone's in British retail.

The Mei Leaf formula: a London tea room with a wall of named single origin teas, a YouTube channel with high production value tasting videos, and a polished retail experience that treats Chinese tea the way Berry Bros & Rudd treats wine. Don is articulate, telegenic, and unembarrassed about being interested in tea, which, for a British audience, took some work to make socially acceptable.

Why Mei Leaf matters

For a long time, the only way to drink properly presented Chinese tea in the UK was to know someone Chinese, fly to China, or pay £8 for a sad teabag at a hotel afternoon tea. Mei Leaf changed that. The Camden tea room offers walk in tasting flights at sensible prices, the staff actually know what they're talking about, and the retail bags they sell are genuine single origin teas at fair prices for the quality.

What Don and Mei Leaf get right:

- **The retail experience is properly designed.** Walking into Mei Leaf is like walking into a really good record shop, same energy, same staff knowledge, same "you'll find something you didn't know you wanted" vibe. Other British tea retail mostly fails this test.
- **The YouTube production is broadcast quality.** Multi camera setups, clean audio, structured tasting notes on screen. It looks like a real product, not a hobby channel.
- **Don can actually taste.** His tasting vocabulary is precise; he distinguishes "stone fruit" from "tropical fruit" from "honeyed" and explains what processing produces each. The tasting flights are genuine education.
- **The pricing is straightforward.** Their £15-25 packs of single origin tea are fairly priced for the quality. They have premium tier teas at £100+ but they don't pretend the £20 stuff is something it isn't.

What to watch first if you're new

- **The Tea Lab series** Don's structured walk throughs of specific teas. Pick a tea family you're curious about and start with the relevant Tea Lab episode.
- **The "tasting at home" tutorials** on how to set up a tasting flight with three teas. Genuinely useful for hosting friends.
- **The factory and farm visits:** less of a focus than Jesse Appell but still excellent. The Wuyi rock tea videos are particularly good.
- **The "is it worth it?" cost comparison videos** Don opens premium priced teas next to mid range teas and asks the obvious question. Often the answer is "for most drinkers, no."

Where Mei Leaf fits alongside teas.co.uk

We aim to sell all tea, and we look forward to working with Don and the Mei Leaf team in the future. teas.co.uk is curated British tea retail with 110 brands and sensible per cup pricing; Mei Leaf is single origin Chinese specialty tea at premium pricing for serious tea drinkers. The audience overlap is people who started with a daily everything cup and got curious about what's behind the curtain. Both shops have a place in that journey.

If you're someone whose tea cupboard is mostly Yorkshire Tea Original but who's started watching Mei Leaf videos at 11pm and bought a £25 pouch of single origin oolong, you're our customer AND theirs. Both work in your tea life. Use teas.co.uk for the daily everything cup; use Mei Leaf when you want to taste single origin Chinese leaf properly.

The verdict on Mei Leaf

Don Mei is the best ambassador British tea drinking has had in a long time. Mei Leaf is one of the rare retail experiences where the brand promise and the actual cup match up. The YouTube channel is one of the more polished tea education resources globally; the tea room is worth a Camden visit if you're in London.

The mild critique: Mei Leaf's Chinese tea only focus means you won't find a proper builders' brew there. They don't really do British tea heritage; if you want a comprehensive tea education, you also need someone like teas.co.uk for the British classics. Don knows this and doesn't try to be everything. Respect for that.

If you're British, curious about tea beyond the supermarket aisle, and you've never been to the Mei Leaf tea room, make a Saturday of it. The Camden Town location is unfussy and the staff will brew you whatever you want without judgement.

Where to find them

Mei Leaf operates the Camden tea room (47 Brecknock Road, North London), the meileaf.com online shop, and the YouTube channel. The brand sometimes appears at British tea events and food festivals; if you're in London, the tea room is the experience. If you're elsewhere in the UK, the online shop and YouTube content cover most of what makes the brand distinctive.

For the wider context see the Jesse's Tea House overview, the Wu Mountain Tea overview, the oolong tea overview, the tieguanyin overview, the Da Hong Pao overview, the pu erh tea overview, the silver needle white overview, the genmaicha overview, and the loose leaf brewing guide.

In short: Don Mei and Mei Leaf

Field	Detail
Best known for	UK Chinese tea retail (Mei Leaf, London), YouTube tea education, gongfu brewing demos
Tea categories most-covered	Sheng pu-erh, oolong, white tea, dark tea, yancha, dancong
Style	Direct, opinionated, retail-anchored, deep on cultivar and processing
UK relevance	Single most-watched Chinese tea educator in the UK, retail catalogue ships within the UK

Why he matters to a UK drinker

Don Mei runs the only meaningful-scale UK-based Chinese tea retailer with a serious media presence. The YouTube content is searchable by category, the gongfu brewing demos are filmed from above so the gaiwan technique is visible, and the editorial line is pro-Chinese-tea without slipping into anti-British-tea snobbery. Mei Leaf's Camden showroom does in-person tastings most weekends.

The retail catalogue sits at the premium end (pu-erh cakes at £80, single-cultivar oolongs at £15+/50g), and not every video reads as neutral when it doubles as marketing for that week's release. Use the channel as a free Chinese tea school, and buy from teas.co.uk or from friends in the trade like Mei Leaf, Rare Tea and the smaller independents, whoever has the lot you want.

What to taste alongside

Don Mei's teaching catalogue is one of the broadest in English-language tea education. Start with a quality sheng pu-erh (Don's signature category), a premium oolong, and a white tea from a specialist. Use a porcelain gaiwan for the gongfu sessions he demonstrates. His video archive on YouTube is searchable by category and is the closest thing to a free tea-school the British internet offers.

Sensible options on the same shelf: English Breakfast, Earl Grey, green tea, loose leaf tea, Darjeeling, oolong, and herbal tea. There is plenty more in the tea shop, and UK postage is free above £35.

FROM THE CURATOR

teas · Per-cup price is the only price that matters. Loose leaf usually wins; supermarket bags sometimes do too.

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