

How to judge teapot quality

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A teapot is the heart of your tea making tools. A good teapot allows the flavour in expensive-quality tea to be brought out, while its earthy feel and elegant appearance have a sense of presence which helps you be 'present' with the experience of the tea itself.

Connoisseurs look for the following qualities in a good teapot:

1. **Quality of the clay -**

Yixing clay is very porous, which is the reason that it is such a good vessel for brewing tea: it is able to retain the fragrance as well as trap tea particles in these pores. With frequent usage, more and more tea particles are trapped, so that every time you brew tea, fragrance is released, and when mixed with the current brew this makes the tea taste far better than if it was brewed in a new teapot.

A porcelain teapot will never acquire this property.

2. **Easy to hold -**

An oversize pot could well be too heavy to hold comfortably when filled with tea, so one should find a pot that is easy to lift even when full. Also, the size of the teapot determines the handle, its placement and size, but its placement will determine the centre of gravity of the teapot when filled with tea. It should not feel difficult to hold or pour, but rather be comfortable in the hand.

3. **Well crafted -**

As the Greeks knew, good proportion is the basis of beauty. In a pot, all its parts should be in proportion to each other, providing an overall sense of beauty. The lines should be pleasing to the eye, and the colour harmonious.

On the other hand, tastes differ, so the bottom line is that if you like the pot this is the best reason for collecting it. As you use it, your appreciation of it will grow.

4. **Smooth water flow -**

A good flow is important in a pot: it should not be too slow, should not drip, and should not leave a residue in the pot. Too slow and the tea leaves will be steeped overlong, a residue in the pot will make the tea bitter, and of course dripping is messy. The Chinese tea experts say that tea poured from a teapot with straight spout will have a better fragrance than that poured from a pot with a curving spout, but that a curving spout makes the tea have a better after-taste in the throat!

4. **Tight cover -**

The teapot cover should seal the teapot as tightly as possible. This allows the teapot to draw, and holds all the fragrance of the tea leaves within the pot. One can test this by filling the pot two-thirds full of water, moistening the edge of the lid, then sealing the opening in the lid with your finger and trying to pour the water out. If the lid is properly tight, as befits a high quality teapot, no water will come out of the spout until your finger is removed from the hole in the lid.

6. Exterior appearance -

Check for chips or cracks, which happen easily in clay pots; the outside of the pot should be smooth and complete. Look particularly at the edge of the lid, the edge of the opening, and the spout.

7. Smell of clay -

New teapots usually have no smell, but some teapots do exhibit some unpleasant clay smell which if not properly treated will seriously affect the taste of your tea.