



(Above) Lisa Biafore, owner of The Tea Shoppe, is flanked by her two daughters, Regina and Rachel. (Below) The Tea Shoppe sells a bounty of wonderful wares, including pretty teapots and teacups.



The Tea Shoppe

A Teatime Respite in West Virginia

Text by Katherine Cloninger Ellis
Photography Courtesy of Regina Biafore

When you think of afternoon tea, Morgantown, West Virginia, might not come to mind, but Lisa Biafore, the owner of The Tea Shoppe, is diligently working to make a name for her innovative retail-tearoom café hybrid in the city that she knows and loves.

After spending 28 years in the corporate world working in project and contract management, Lisa was on the hunt for a fun and fulfilling retirement endeavor into which she could pour her passions. A longtime tea drinker and lover of entertaining, Lisa jumped at the chance to purchase a local tea business when it was up for sale in 2013 and decided to bring her two daughters, Rachel and Regina, along for the journey. “This has truly become a family business,” Lisa remarks. “The girls are as invested in this opportunity as I am and continue to grow the business in great ways.”



(Left) The popular Berrylicious Salad, served with a homemade dressing, attracts afternoon-tea lovers and locals alike. (Below) The charming and approachable tearoom is located in a historic building, which adds to the appeal of this unique destination.

Situated in a notable building that is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is the former home to the Seneca Glass Company from 1891 to 1983, The Tea Shoppe is the only tearoom or tea shop within a 90-mile radius. Lisa's initial research when conceptualizing what The Tea Shoppe would entail led her to believe that Morgantown would not be able to support a traditional tearoom. After some brainstorming, as well as tapping into her dedication to bring the joys of teatime to her community, Lisa cleverly decided that creating a "retail quasi-café" business model would be the best way to get people in the door and present the world of tea to newcomers in an approachable fashion. Boasting about the excellent rooibos brews available at the shop might not have turned heads, but rave reviews of a delicious café in town might translate to new customers. "We are introducing people to tea without a hefty price tag," Lisa notes. "We are giving them a nice and quiet place to relax, while having the unique opportunity to educate people on tea."

The retail side of the business sells 180 different premium loose-leaf teas, including white, green, oolong, black, pu-erh, rooibos, and some herbal and fruit selections, as well as plenty of tea wares, accessories, and a variety of local products. The Tea Shoppe blends some of their own teas and works with larger tea manufacturers, such as Metropolitan Tea Company and Adagio, to produce the majority of the shop's inventory. Lisa's knowledge of tea and preference for only drinking loose-leaf varieties stems from her experience with the reputable World Tea Academy and the six tea certifications that she has earned through her studies there.





(Left) A scrumptious sampling of scones, savories, and sweets are paired with two tea blends for a carryout version of afternoon tea.

(Above) The Tea Shoppe sells more than 180 premium loose-leaf teas in their West Virginia storefront and online.

"I wanted to stick with the quality that you get from a loose-leaf tea," Lisa states. "I don't want to sell something that you can get in the supermarket." The brand's best sellers are typically British favorites, like breakfast teas and Earl Greys; however, chais and fruit-forward blends become popular in the winter and summer.

Visitors to The Tea Shoppe may choose to select offerings from the luncheon menu with items ranging from gourmet sandwiches and fresh salads to homemade soups and quiches, to enjoy one of four lovely tea services, and/or to peruse the delightful products available in the store. The tea services available are Royal, Formal, Afternoon, and Cream. The Afternoon Tea service is the most popular and includes four tea sandwiches, four sweets, a scone, and, of course, a pot of tea. The scrumptious recipes in each course vary by the season, with everything made fresh in-house down to the salad dressing for their beloved Berrylicious Salad. The atmosphere of the tearoom café can be described as "quaint and comfortable" with patrons of all walks of life and interests finding a peaceful respite inside its walls. "We have some people who come dressed to the nines, little girls in princess dresses, and others in shorts and flip-flops," Lisa chuckles. "It's a little bit of everything and everyone in the best way, and we have managed to set ourselves apart from other restaurants."

A myriad of special events hosted by The Tea Shoppe brings both business and the potential for new tea lovers to be born. Frequent tea tastings, themed tea parties for children, tea and chocolate pairings, tea etiquette classes for teens, and gatherings for fans of *Downton Abbey* and *Harry Potter* help to familiarize and welcome the community into the vast tea world. "We do as much

as we can to get people into the business and try tea," Lisa explains. "If someone says, 'I don't like tea,' then my response is, 'Well, you haven't tried the right tea yet!'"

What is guaranteed in every visit or purchase from The Tea Shoppe is excellent customer service from start to finish. It's a testament to Lisa's long career in the industry and shows the aptitude and kindness of her employees. One of the Biafore women, either Lisa or her daughters, is always in the dining room ready to greet customers with a smile and to ensure that everything is going well. The staff is required to attend a Tea 101 class so they are able to give specific tea recommendations when asked. They are also encouraged to drink as much tea as they would like to know the teas better and to help introduce tea novices to the beloved beverage.

It's not the number of customers or sales that drives Lisa, but rather the simple joys of viewing people experiencing the wonder of tea for the first time. "Watching people see their afternoon-tea service come out on a three-tiered tray and seeing the excited looks on their faces is wonderful," Lisa states. "This business is much more than I thought it was going to be." Whether she's pouring a delicious brew for someone who has never tried tea before or welcoming a café patron that has decided to try a tea service instead of his or her regular panini order, Lisa's valiant efforts have undoubtedly changed the landscape of Morgantown, West Virginia, through cups of tea and lots of care. ☕

The Tea Shoppe, located at 709 Beechurst Avenue #23, Morgantown, West Virginia 26505, is open Tuesday through Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Saturday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., and Sunday from 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. For more information, call 304-413-0890 or visit theteashoppewv.com.

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