

Tealet Exemplifies Transparency

By Elizabeth Dobos April 21, 2020

Tealet is a Las Vegas-based tea wholesaler and tearoom that prioritizes transparency in its tea sourcing. Founder Elyse Petersen, who has a background as a food scientist and worked in the food industry doing product development, quality control, and FDA compliance, formed Tealet to connect tea farmers with tea businesses and makes transparency central to her business model.

While working in the food industry, Petersen was drawn to natural and organic products.



Photo courtesy of Elyse Petersen

Then, she left the United States to work in the Peace Corps in Niger for two years as an agriculture extension agent among local farmers. “It was there that my whole life changed—the whole outlook of what I’m doing. Actually, the foundation of what I do now all started from that experience,” Petersen said. “What was influential in that experience was the level of happiness that I was surrounded by in that community where there wasn’t an abundance of food, healthcare, shelter, and resources. I found that happiness was rooted in the intimate connection with the things that they did need—specifically around food.”

Petersen believes being intimately connected with the production of one’s food is a source of happiness and something that all should have the pleasure of enjoying. However, in the

Western food system, most people are disconnected from the production of their food. Upon returning to the United States in 2008, Petersen set out to rebuild the connection between the producer and the consumer.



Photo courtesy of Elyse Petersen

She became the quality control supervisor for ITO EN in Hawaii, which was her first exposure to tea. “For the first time in the food industry, I actually felt like I was producing a healthy product,” said Petersen. She developed the traceability program for the company that involves a coding system.

While pursuing her MBA at the University of Hawaii the college of agriculture invited her to do a market feasibility study for the United States Department of Agriculture on growing tea in Hawaii. She studied *Camellia sinensis*, met with tea farmers, researched the tea industry and wrote a report. In 2011 she interned at the Kyoto Obubu Tea Farm in Kyoto, Japan and her life became immersed in tea.

Petersen went on to form the International Tea Farms Alliance, which has the goal of bridging tea farmers with tea lovers.



Photo courtesy of Elyse Petersen

In 2012, she founded Tealet to import teas into the American market. Her goal is to find the biggest wholesale market for tea farmers, distributors and teahouse owners who want to buy fully transparent direct trade tea. “It’s a new concept of collaborative consumption,” said Petersen, who has met all of the farmers whose tea she imports. She feels the demand for transparency is what has bolstered her business’s success. Tealet has sold more than 800 teas, many of which are seasonal. Tealet’s Grower List is on its [website](#).

Petersen sells to consumers in her tearoom, which has an eclectic décor that includes a collection of gifts she received during her international travels. She hosts special events, classes and educational appointments with hospitality professionals. “I think hospitality professionals are the most important people to educate now because once we get good quality tea and tea service into fine dining, I think the rest of the market is going to start to come together very quickly,” said Petersen.

She also travels to tea festivals to educate people on the topics of assessing the value of tea and on how to know whether a tea is ethically cultivated.

Petersen says passion and patience are necessary for entering the tea industry.

For more details visit [Tealet’s Facebook page](#).