

# VIP *Very important producer*

Henrietta Lovell, founder of the Rare Tea Company, climbs mountains to source the finest leaves and wants us all to become tea connoisseurs

**I used to get taken out for dinner in China**

when I was working for a large multinational company. Instead of showing off with wine, people would do so with tea – I grew fascinated by the different varieties and flavours.

**In the UK, people used to drink green tea**

**to be healthy, not for the flavour.** I wanted to give people really delicious, indulgent teas, not just bitter brews for the virtuous.

**The catalyst that finally made me take the plunge and set up the business was my father.**

He was just about to retire – he had a host of plans and dreams he'd saved up – when he was diagnosed with cancer. He died within three months. I realised I had to seize the moment.

**In China, you can pay anything from 20p to £2,000 for a kilo of tea leaves.** Tea is a ritual

over there and it is taken very seriously.

**I buy direct from the farmers that grow tea high up in the Fujian mountains, *below*.**

Nothing else grows that high up, but tea has been there for 5,000 years. Some African

countries grow tea too; I am visiting Malawi this year to source high-grown, single-estate teas.

**I think a lot of people don't realise that black, green and white tea all come from the same plant.** It is just a question of processing.

**I would love to see the return of the tea chest.**

You can keep your favourite flavours and blend them yourself – all you need is a pot and a strainer! You can become a connoisseur and give our national drink the respect it deserves.

**My favourite tea from our range is Emperor's**

**Breakfast;** you don't need to add sugar or milk – just allow it to blend for a full four minutes for the sweet caramel flavours to come through.

**The novelist Alexander McCall Smith is a big**

**fan** of my teas and will soon be writing short stories for me, which will be included inside the tins of the new African teas.

