



HIGH TEA

Like fine wine, tea takes on the character of its surroundings. Fairmont's Kenyan teas are mainly sourced from the Changoi and Tinderet estates in the Great Rift Valley, where the rich volcanic earth and dense rainfall create an expressive brew.

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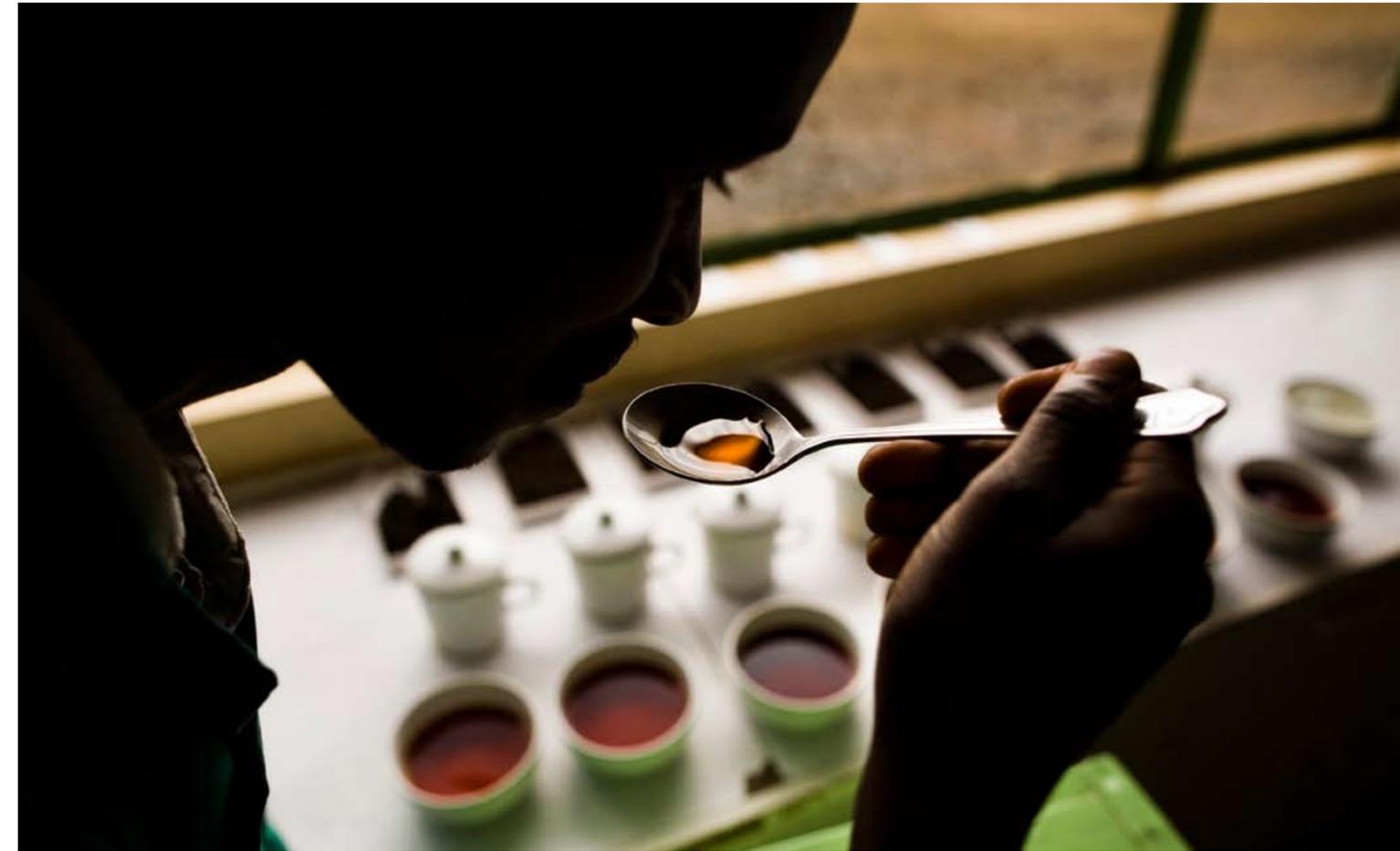
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The short flight from Nairobi to the valley passes above salt lakes where flamingos nest and it's not uncommon to spot a lion, elephant or giraffe in the Nandi Hills district. You know you've arrived at the sight of deep swathes of green.



Field guide

Pickers with baskets on their backs wiggle artfully around the dense full-grown bushes, plucking new shoots – just below the bud and top two leaves – from the highest branches. These are pruned to the height of a privet hedge: Untamed, they'd reach 30 ft (9 m). The husbandry on these estates is of such a high standard that there's no need for herbicide. (Bugs hate this elevation, so crops are pesticide-free, too.) The leaves are treated with reverence on their journey from field to factory: Bags of fresh-picked tea are hung on hooks in trailers, never tossed in piles.



A new leaf

At the factory, inspectors weigh the leaf and check that it isn't bruised or mixed with stalk – then they assign it a grade. Afterwards, it's withered in aerated troughs, releasing an intensely fresh, uplifting aroma. Within 24 hours, the leaf is limp and thus easy to cut, chop and roll. The leaf from these estates, which is of a higher quality and favored in Fairmont blends, is rolled with gentle yet firm pressure through a cast-iron or steel device – like an old-fashioned mangle. As the leaf twists, it already begins to ferment, changing color from grasshopper green to sultry copper. The fermented leaf is then dried in a hot-air chamber, where it turns a richly nuanced black.



Green acres

Like all workers on these fair-trade and Rainforest Alliance certified estates, pickers start their day sipping tea – sampling their own wares. Their communities have good services and medical clinics, and the surrounding area is serviced by neatly bordered, tarmac routes. Families live together; children spend their days in school and at play.



TEA AT THE FAIRMONT

- Brews available at Afternoon Tea: 19
- Optimum steep time: 3 mins for green, 5 mins for black, up to 7 mins for herbal
- Number of countries around the world from which Fairmont sources its teas: 18
- Number of weeks a year that tea is in its peak season in a given region: 2-4 (all Fairmont luxury teas are sourced within these periods)
- Percentage of Fairmont's tea line that is certified USDA organic: 75

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