

FOOD & WINE

Catch a buzz with tea, whiskey, rye, or a Little Red Corvette

WHAT IN the world is a tea bar? Think "saloon meets tea room" — or visit Gold Leaf Spice and Teas Carmel, a business located inside Aabha Indian Cuisine in the Barnyard shopping center. Lea Johnson and her husband, attorney Aaron John-

son, are second-generation owners of Gold Leaf, and they're excited about the soft opening in progress at its new spot.

Soup to Nuts

The company was founded by Lea's mom, Terri Madrid, in 2009, and the shop on Gabilan Street in Oldtown Salinas has a large, devoted following. Madrid explained that the idea of a tea bar came to her in a dream. No extended pinkies or stately ceremonies — just somewhere to gather, mingle and relax without alcohol.

She and her husband, Tom, experimented with hundreds of teas and dozens of spices, quickly attracting foodies on the lookout for new trends, and cooks who preferred to buy cinnamon, nutmeg and the like in small quantities so they'd always be fresh.

Big menu

The Salinas bar's first space was so tiny, "we had to suck in our stomachs to get by each other," recalled Johnson with a laugh. Within a few years, it moved next door to its present location, a larger room with

more shelves and seating — almost all built by Tom. Johnson took over when her parents retired a couple of years ago. The shop's substantial tea menu rivals many restaurants' wine lists in size and variety, and everyone who works there is well-informed and eager to educate consumers about the subtleties of the ancient beverage. There are more than 85 varieties available in Carmel, selected from over

300 at the Salinas store, including many blends created by staff and customers. All are brewed to order and can be served hot or iced.

Johnson said she's still trying to figure out what will sell best around here, so, "if you don't see something you want, just

Continues next page



The Red Ferrari Spritz is one of several car-themed cocktails on offer at the Old Fisherman's Grotto in Monterey. The souped-up version of the classic Aperol Spritz uses Veuve Clicquot.

SPIRITS

From previous page

■ Phantom of the Grotto

Old Fisherman's Grotto on Monterey's Fisherman's Wharf is offering several auto-themed drink specials. The Little Red Corvette features Tito's Vodka with Sugar Island Rum, black raspberry and sweet-and-sour mix, while the Rolls-Royce Phantom Martini combines Casamigos Mezcal with Citronge orange liqueur and fresh lime. The Red Ferrari Spritz features Veuve Clicquot Champagne, Aperol Aperitivo and Angostura bitters. We can feel those engines purring already.