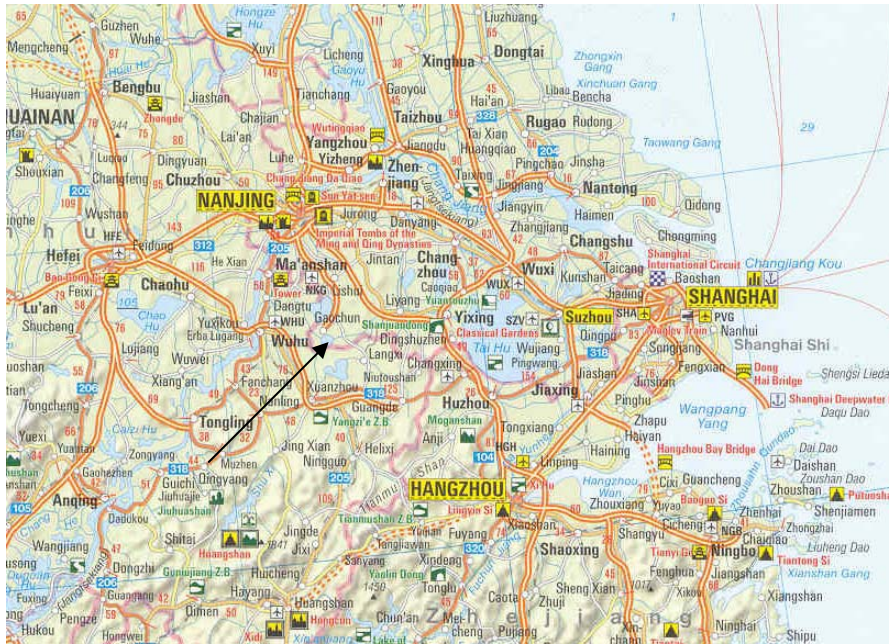


# Tiny teapots with huge history.



The story goes, that if a Yixing teapot is used for many years, you no longer need to put tealeaves in the pot to brew a cup of tea. Yixing teapots are not glazed after firing and the inside is slightly porous. A patina is built in the teapot, seasoning the pot.

## The origin

Yixing, pronounced as yee-shing, a town approximately 190 kilometers from Shanghai, has for centuries been known as "the Pottery Capital of China." Yixing teapots have a very interesting history dating to the Sung Dynasty (960-1279) when the special clay was found around Lake Tai Hu. During the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644 AD) the first teapots were created here. It might have been a monk living in a temple near Yixing who made the first teapot. In the 16th century production and interest grew. But there were still very few master potters. They made small quantities of teapots, primarily for scholars and collectors.

As demand for Yixing tea ware increased, more potters took up the craft, also the shapes of the pots were simplified so that mass production was possible. Unfortunately during the 18th century the interest vanished and there were no new designs created. Near the end of the 18th century the Magistrate of Yixing, Chen Mansheng, tried to revive interest in Yixing stone wares. He encouraged potters to make new designs and started the trend for engraving inscriptions onto the pots. Until this day, the Yixing teapots are considered the best for brewing tea. It is said



*Yixing teapot, height 8.5 cm. Private collection.*

that the flavour of the tea is enhanced when brewed in a Yixing teapot. And indeed, I experienced this myself, while using my own Yixing teapots. When the boiled water was poured in, a slight clay like smell arose from the teapot. There are several colours, but the most traditional is reddish brown, other natural colours are, red, dark brown, yellow, blue, green and a rare white. The authentic Yixing clay, contains no lead or other toxics and is the ideal raw material for making teapots. The reddish brown colour is due to the concentration of iron in the clay and the adding of oxygen during firing.

All the characteristic Yixing colours are called zisha but the most valued colour is zishayao, or purple sandware. The relatively high concentration of iron produces a deep purplish brown colour, also called “pear skin”.



*Yixing teapot in the form of a trunk, height 9 cm. Private collection.*



*Chop Marks are the insignia of the person who crafted the pot. They can be found on the bottom, the lid and even at the base of the handle.*

Yixing teapots are decorative items real pieces of art, they are very functional and have an amazing beauty. Traditionally, Yixing teapots used to be rather small, so that each person had his own. Yixing teapots were and are still used for brewing tea as well as to drink from. These little teapots with their designs taken from nature or geometric shapes came to Europe with the first shipments of tea in the early 17th century. Teapots were still unknown in Europe so they served as models for early Dutch, German and English teapots. Although each teapot is a collector’s item, Yixing teapots are made to be used. Typical for Yixing teapots is the enormous variation in form and the refinement in finishing of the pots. The teapots are not always made on a potter’s wheel but are also completely created by hand so every form is possible.



*Yixing teapot, height 9 cm. Collection Ta-Hwa. The Oriental Art & Gift Company, Amsterdam.*



*Yixing teapot, height 7 cm. Collection Ta-Hwa. The Oriental Art & Gift Company, Amsterdam.*

The expression of nature is evident in the design of these teapots showing animals, plants and sunset features.

### **Yixing teapots in Europe**

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century more and more people were drinking tea and maybe also due to the Chinoiserie, a great interest in Chinese style, there was a huge demand for Chinese teapots. Potters in Holland, like de Milde and de Caluwe, and potters in Germany like Böttger and Elers in England tried to copy Yixing teapots. The only problem was the clay, which not contained the important ingredient kaolin. Around 1740 the production in Holland as well as in Germany ended because of a change in taste and fashion.

### **A visit to the Jeroen Bechtold Gallery**

Jeroen Bechtold is working as an industrial designer. Since 1995 he uses the computer and the DeskArtes CAD/CAM program to design ceramics.

CAD means Computer- Aided Design and CAM: Computer- Aided Manufacturing.

With this program he can design for instance teapots.



In 1996 Jeroen Bechtold was invited to the “First Yixing Symposium for Western Potters”. They could also see the local potters at work. Because it was a “Teapot Congress” Jeroen designed some teapots with the DeskArtes CAD/CAM program. Every ceramist could choose a “teacher”. Jeroen choose Gu Wei Fen. She was able to transform the computer-designed teapot into a real one. Only simple tools were used like a wooden hammer, to beat the clay, a knife and chop sticks.



*This teapot was made by Gu Wei Fen, the “teacher” of Jeroen Bechtold.*

In 1996-1997 he made designs for “Purple Sands Factory no 5” in Yixing. Technical drawings and design data could be sent via internet to the factory and the object in this

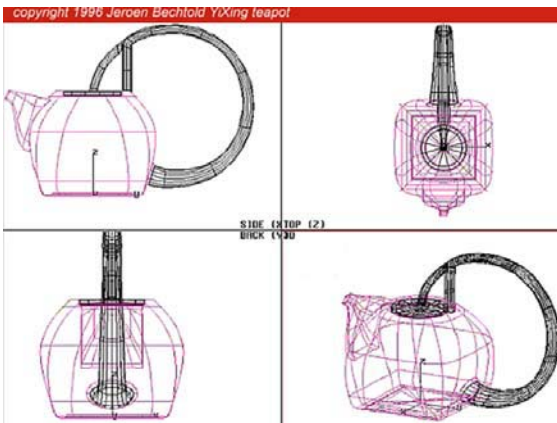
case a teapot was made. The communication is fast and the distance unimportant.



*Teapot shop in Yixing. Photo Jeroen Bechtold.*



*Dragonkiln (long furnace) in Yixing. The small building down below is the fireplace. Going up the artificial hill is the kiln made of clay were the ceramics are fired. The chimney is uphill. The rooftiles keep the kiln from wetness. This is the last remaining kiln left in the area, it is believed to be 300 years old. For preheating and firing, that takes 38 hours, 5000 kg of dry pinewood is used. Before World War II there used to be ten of these enormous kilns in this area. Photo Jeroen Bechtold.*



Computer design of the teapot on the right.



Notice the "Chop Mark" and Jeroen Bechtold design stamp.



Teapot with engravings, height 6 cm.  
Collection Jeroen Bechtold.

Nowadays Yixing teapots are used for tea ceremonies. The small teapot serves six people. A very small amount of tea is poured into the cups just to taste the tea. A small hole in the lid of the teapot makes it possible to stop the pouring of tea.



The hole is closed with a fingertip.



The hole is open, the tea can be poured out.

Since he visited Yixing Jeroen has a private collection of Yixing teapots. We were allowed to make some photographs.



*Teapot with a gallant scene, height 6.5 cm.  
Collection Jeroen Bechtold.*



*Chop marks on the bottom and the lid of the teapot.*



*A very stylish teapot, height 12.3 cm.  
Collection Jeroen Bechtold.*



*Yixing teapot with a small dragon on the lid,  
height 8.3 cm.  
Collection Jeroen Bechtold.*

All over the world people are collecting Yixing teapots. Each teapot is an individual piece of art, still made with the skill and artistry from ages and fitting in the palm of a hand.



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Websites of interest:

[www.home.tiscali.nl/bechtold/yixing2.html](http://www.home.tiscali.nl/bechtold/yixing2.html)

[www.tahwa.nl](http://www.tahwa.nl)