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By Carolyn Jung

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NEW TEA LIQUEUR: What do you get when John Scharffenberger of Berkeley's Scharffen Berger Chocolate Maker and Lance Winters of Alameda's Hangar One Vodka combine their talents? Nope, not chocolate vodka. But **an amazingly elegant craft-distilled tea liqueur.**

The new Qi Lapsang Souchong Tea Liqueur, made at Winters' St. George Spirits in Alameda, is a blend of smoky Lapsang Souchong tea, fruit, spices and barrel-aged chardonnay brandy. The flavor is smoky, with hints of vanilla, peat and honey.

Four years ago, Brian Backus, an entrepreneur with a passion for handmade spirits, approached Scharffenberger, a former winemaker, about trying their hand at making a herbal liqueur. They started talking to Winters, who came up with the idea of using tea.

Qi is a semisweet liqueur that is 40 percent alcohol by volume and only 2 percent sugar by weight (wildflower honey), compared with most liqueurs that are as much as 30 percent sugar. Enjoy it straight, blended in cocktails with citrus and bitter flavors, or in tea and coffee drinks. You also can use it for cooking, especially in meat broths and glazes, as well as in desserts such as creme brulee. A 750-milliliter bottle is \$42 at K&L Wine Merchants in San Francisco and Redwood City; Royal Liquors and Swirl, both in San Francisco; Caddell & Williams in Alameda; and Piedmont Grocery in Oakland. You also can enjoy it at such restaurants as Bacar, Citizen Cake, Frisson, Range, Slanted Door and Solstice, all in San Francisco; and A Côté in Oakland. For more information, go to www.qi spirits.com.

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