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## Winston-Salem tea distributor Chad's Chai to open first tea house this fall

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Winston-Salem-based chai tea developer and distributor Chad's Chai is opening a brick-and-mortar after 16 years of serving the community.

After wholesaling their teas to coffee shops and restaurants and holding a recurring spot at the Cobblestone Farmers Market, creator and owner Chad Morris and his co-owner Thomas Lees view having a tea house location "as a natural step."

"There's always been this dream of having a place where people could come, and we'd serve chai because it's always been about community. That's our core value," Morris said.

"Our slogan is 'Tea worth sharing,' and it revolves around having something good. Not just something good, but something you can create community with. Something you can share with people."



LILLIAN JOHNSON

Chad's Chai, a local tea manufacturer, will open its first tea house in downtown Winston-Salem at 617 N. Liberty Street.

The teahouse will be located at the old Winston-Salem Chronicle building at 617 N. Liberty Street in the downtown arts district, with the owners shooting for its opening this fall.

The investment in the new 3,600-square-foot location was around \$250,000-\$300,000, according to the owners.

Morris and Lees wanted to stay true to the culture of the building, keeping the Chronicle's mural on the side of the location.

North Liberty Street and Trade Street have been growing with new businesses for downtown Winston-Salem. Because of this, Morris says the area is right for his company.

"We're super excited about the location. Definitely. That whole area is just really up and coming right now," Morris said. "It's the real happening place right now, so we feel fortunate there."

The space will be home to an innovative way to introduce teas to the community. In addition to their signature spiced chai, the menu choices will be plentiful, including tea-infused wines, iced tea taps, nitro teas, authentic Asian-style teas, bubble teas, milk teas and a variety of pastries. Eventually, the business plans to serve tea cocktails.

The one thing this tea house won't be serving? Coffee.

"The number of coffee houses in Winston has grown a lot over the last few years, but one decision we made early on in our plans was to not serve coffee," Morris told TBJ. "We decided that it would actually help set us apart as a different kind of place."

Lees agreed and emphasized that they want to focus on the quality and affordability of the tea "the way that coffee shops do it for coffee."

"We're just hoping that with a brick and mortar, we'll be able to kind of help people be aware of us," he says. "I think having a brick-and-mortar downtown and with the kind of nightlife and vibrancy that that area is getting, will really draw a lot of new people."

Morris and Lees plan to continue to distribute teas to coffee shops and restaurants and service local farmers' markets.

While Morris will continue to handle the wholesale operations, market manager and soon-to-be teahouse manager Micah Brewer will be running the brick-and-mortar operations. Lees will act as a bridge between the two facets of the business.

"We're making sure that we're still kind of maintaining really good relationships with all of the coffee shops we serve," Lees said.

The interior of the building will feature two skylights and an oval bar in the center, and the location plans to host events and allow performers.

"I just think it's a place where people can hopefully be wowed on two levels. One, by just the amazing great drinks and food they'll have, but also, by the location itself, and being in a place where people will feel really drawn in. We want to not just have a great product, we want to have a great atmosphere," Lees said.

"Hopefully, it's not a children's dream kind of thing."

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