



Argo Tea REFRESHING CONNORS PARK

The Argo Tea greenhouse in Connors Park on the Near North Side of Chicago is a little architectural gem in a city of architectural wonder. What makes the tea-osc so clever is that it serves its setting while being an edifice of Argo Tea's core values. Founded in 2003 by Arsen Avakian (CEO), Simon Simonian and Daniel Lindwasser, Argo Tea does more than serve drinks, it provides people with a one-cup-at-a-time experience.



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DANA DIMITRI
DIRECTOR OF MARKETING
ARGO TEA



Part of that experience is the story of tea. Though it is second only to water in popularity worldwide, tea still has room to grow in the United States, where according to The Tea Association of the U.S.A, the infusion of leaves and herbs was a \$10.41 billion domestic market in 2013. Argo Tea's dedication to rediscovering the diversity and tradition of teas is so successfully compelling that the company is widely recognized as driving a mainstream tea renaissance in the classically coffee-centric urban American setting. The ingredients are sourced directly from growers around the world then blended into unique signature drinks. Each location has a tea host to facilitate tasting and answer questions about caffeine, health benefits and the origins of the menu's food and beverage offerings. In a way, Argo uses tea as a medium to connect people with the important concepts that underlie the operating model.

COMMUNITEA AND CREATIVITEA

"Argo is welcoming, inviting and open to the communities we serve," says Dana Dimitri, director of marketing for Argo Tea. "It is important to make a positive impact in the

community. We raise awareness of the health benefits of tea and the cultural benefits of partnering with responsible suppliers. We provide a space for people to come and work, or study, or meet with friends in an environment where they can experience tea and relax."

The Connors Park greenhouse is a great example of that guiding principle. "What makes it special is that it is a public/private partnership between the Chicago Park District and Argo Tea," says Mark Cuellar, lead designer for Argo Tea, which currently has 29 stores in the United States. "The design objective was to provide the amenity to the park, but not take it over with a big, solid chunky building," says Cuellar. "That is why we came up with the greenhouse concept, to keep the building as transparent as possible and the park as green as possible." The exterior glass structure and necessary mechanical units are complemented with trellis and vines, adding 1,600 square feet of vegetation to the site. Another interesting element is the incorporation of an existing fountain into the interior as a water feature. Argo Tea's greenhouse in Connors Park opened in May of 2013.

project:
Argo Tea Greenhouse at Connors Park

location:
Chicago, Illinois

partners:
Argo Tea
Chicago Park District

lead designer:
Mark Cuellar, Argo Tea

fabricator:
Creative Surfaces, Sioux Falls, S.D.

wilsonart products:
Studio Teak High Pressure Laminate
Capers Solid Surface



“We decided to go with the HPL because we are in a greenhouse and we were concerned with the humidity level. Lifecycle is an important consideration.”

MARK CUELLAR
LEAD DESIGNER, ARGO TEA



SUSTAINABILITEA AND QUALITEA

“Sustainability and quality are two of our core platforms, and that reaches beyond our menu to the use of sustainable design elements, landscaping, energy sources and service items,” says Dimitri. “It is part of our commitment to sustainable business practices. We firmly support the conservation of natural resources, both in how we operate our business and how we select our partners.”

Argo Tea walks the sustainability talk from the smallest disposable details (compostable sporks and knives, shopping bags made from recycled material) to significant installations (renewable wind energy, fixtures made with recycled content). The interior of the Connors Park location features cabinetry, casework, display space, tea host station and POS millwork built with Wilsonart’s [Studio Teak High Pressure Laminate \(HPL\)](#). “Actually, when we started the project we considered natural wood veneer for vertical surfaces of the casework,” says Cuellar. “We decided to go with the HPL because we are in a greenhouse and we were concerned with the humidity level. Lifecycle is an important consideration.” The specification of Wilsonart® Laminate, which is made in the United States and contains recycled content, makes sense on

a philosophical level as well as a practical one.

Once the decision was made to go with HPL for its durability, consistency and tendency to not expand and contract with the variations of the building’s moisture level, the design team started looking at aesthetics. “When we decided to go with HPL, it opened our options to all those beautiful designs, including rare species,” says Cuellar. “Studio Teak has a gorgeous graining to it that we really like. If you just look at veneers you get to a point where you are trying to make them more interesting, and then you realize there are all these beautiful engineered products based on natural materials, but that have color and texture you can’t replicate with natural veneer.” The horizontal countertop in the front of the house is an engineered quartz. Wilsonart® [Solid Surface in a classic Capers](#) design was used for the back of the house counters. “There is a lot of great HPL in the market,” says Cuellar, “but Wilsonart has really beautiful woodgrain designs. Plus, we can source our laminate and solid surface from the same company, and it is widely available to millworkers all over the country. So it makes for a very easy and efficient specification as we expand into new markets.”

Creative Surfaces of Sioux Falls, S.D. is Argo Tea’s longtime supplier for interior fixtures and signage. Specializing in lean fabrication of unique casework, full-service metalwork and the integration of LED technology into graphics, Creative Surfaces naturally fits with the Argo Tea culture.

DIVERSITEA AND CHARITEA

Like all Argo Tea locations, the little greenhouse in Connors Park provides a cozy setting year round for people to meet and experience a broader world through tea. Amidst the aroma of fresh baked goods, a tea-wall with 30 different loose leaf teas offers patrons the opportunity to explore the world under the guidance of the expert tea host. Baristas prepare artisan food and signature drinks in a setting that is both open space and open forum. Art exhibition and music is encouraged. Each quarter Argo Tea highlights a special seasonal drink and donates 10% of the sales to a charity partner that is inline with the company’s core beliefs.

“We are committed to being a sustainable business by working with the best local and global suppliers and artisans,” says Dimitri. “By contributing back to our communities we are able to support a healthy lifestyle and the conservation of natural resources. And that is what allows us to deliver consistent quality and a genuine Argo experience.”

