

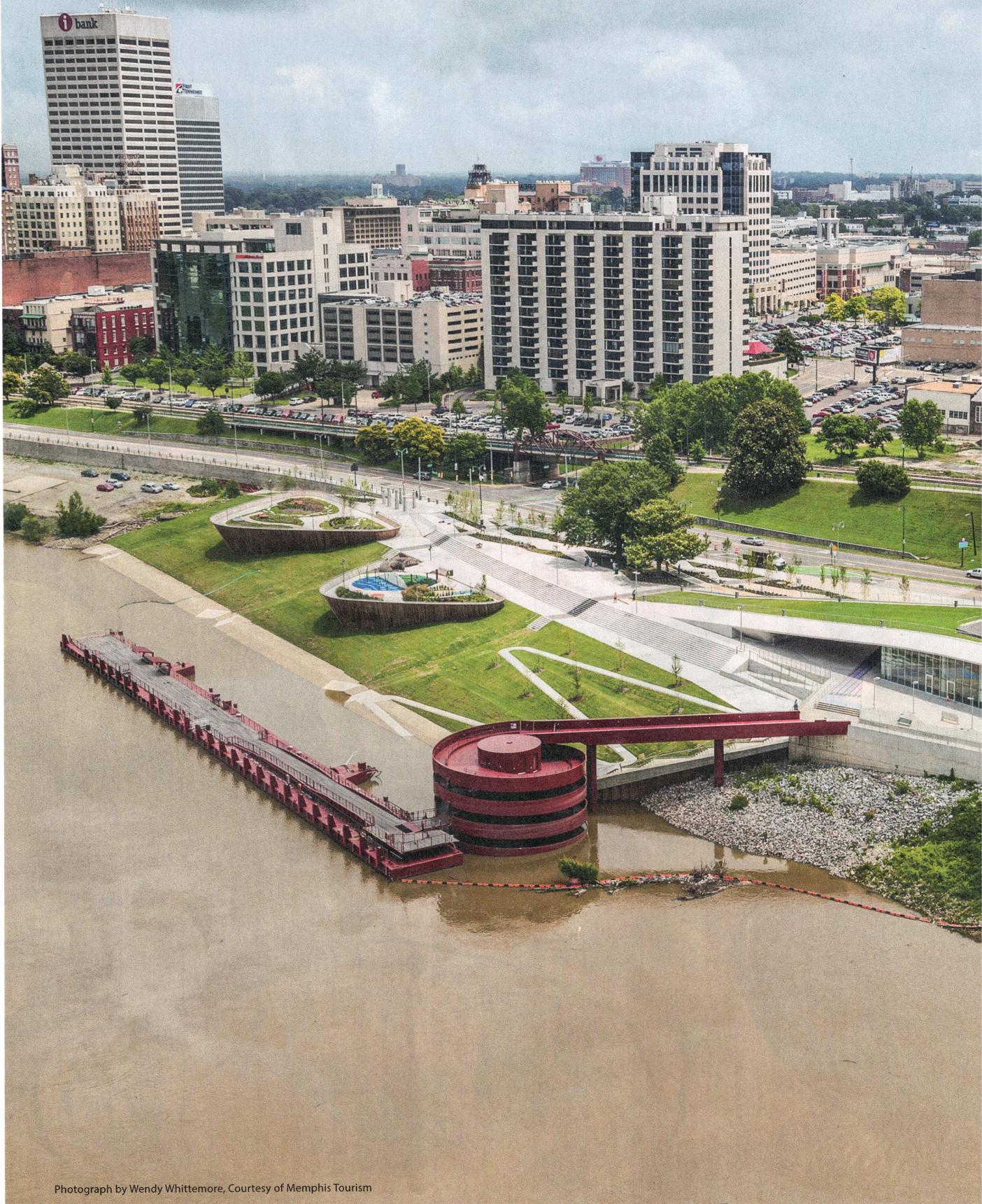
Photograph Courtesy of The Peabody Memphis

Taking Tea in Memphis

A city steeped in music history and BBQ

Text by Sharon McDonnell

Beyond rock 'n' roll, blues, and soul landmarks such as Elvis Presley's home at Graceland, Stax Museum of American Soul Music, and the Blues Hall of Fame, this city in West Tennessee on the Mississippi River is often equated with some of the best mouthwatering BBQ in the country. But if you're thirsty for afternoon tea, charming spots await in Memphis, from a hotel famous for ducks marching in its lobby, a tearoom with a Victorian vibe, and a tearoom in an antiques mall to two nonprofits that help local women.



Photograph by Wendy Whittemore, Courtesy of Memphis Tourism



Enchanted Tea Lounge

433 North Cleveland Street • Memphis, Tennessee 38104
901-337-7723 • enchantedtealounge.com

Step into this elegant tearoom to find Victorian tufted and striped sofas, Queen Anne armchairs, marble-topped coffee tables, and Oriental rugs and hear Mozart's *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* and other classical masterworks playing softly in the background. Behind a white gilt-edged sofa, there's a "living wall" of (faux) greenery and flowers. The fascinator hats, teaware, and antique silver sold up front add to the vintage vibe.

For owner Barbara Wall, tea conjures cherished memories of bonding with her grandmother in Mississippi over tea and tea cakes. "I've always had a love affair with tea," she says. "My mission is to convert every coffee drinker to a tea drinker." So, after 20 years working at the sheriff's office and six years of planning, she opened Enchanted Tea Lounge in 2022. "You have dreams about what you want to do with your life, and you only have one lifetime," Barbara quips.

Most teas here, other than Earl Grey and English and Irish Breakfast teas, are her own blends, and she welcomes making custom blends. Cinna-Vanilla combines black tea with cinnamon's heavenly scent and vanilla and "tastes like fall." Her French Blend black tea has robust, malty notes of Ceylon, Nilgiri, Assam, and Kenya teas tempered with flowery character, featuring vanilla,

Photography Courtesy of Enchanted Tea Lounge and
Tavarus Bady/In Your Element Photography



lavender, jasmine, and bergamot. One of her most soothing green teas, Bohemian Raspberry, has sweet raspberry notes, grassy undertones, and a honeyed finish. Her Bourbon St. Vanilla is a cinnamon-spice-flavored rooibos. Her teas are from English Tea Store, whose tea is sourced from England, and her colorful floral porcelain teaware is from Brew to a Tea. Her daughter, Amber, is the chef and baker.

Afternoon tea for \$40 features sandwiches, which rotate monthly (such as BBQ chicken with sauce slider, spicy chicken slider, turkey and cheese, strawberries with cream cheese, and chicken salad), and sweet treats such as a lemon cheesecake bite, strawberry shortcake, and macarons in such flavors as caramel, chocolate, and strawberry. Tea is served in a French press, approximately three cups. (Teapots are only used for catering.) A glass of Champagne is \$10 extra. Afternoon tea for children 12 or under is \$30, and hot chocolate or lemonade can substitute for tea. At Sunday brunch, chicken frittata, casseroles, and other dishes are also offered.



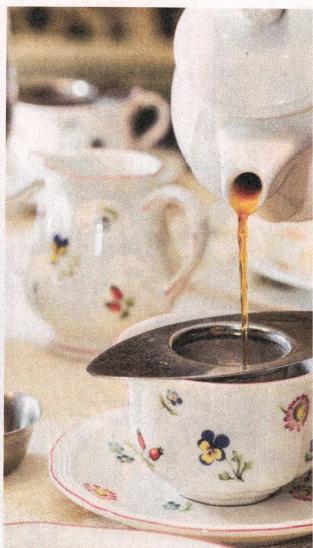
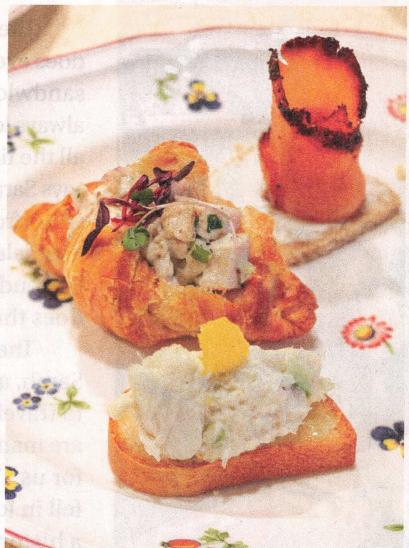
"Some men come here on a first date or take their wives for their birthdays, and anniversaries, birthday parties, and church groups are popular here," says Barbara. Occasional events include opera singers and a Mother's Day jewelry-making event. The tearoom's location also recalls memories for Barbara: It's across the street from where her mother worked. Today, it's Crosstown Concourse, a restaurant and shopping complex that contains the Memphis Listening Lab, where you can hear 50,000 vinyl records and 10,000 CDs, free, in a living room-like setting.

Enchanted Tea Lounge is open from 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday, and from 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Sunday. Reservations are required.

The Enchanted Tea Lounge features Victorian décor and brightly colored floral teaware. (Top right) Children wear fascinators and hold fans, sold by the tearoom, by a sofa in the front window. (Left and opposite page, bottom) The tearoom's "living wall" serves as an ideal backdrop for commemorative photos for groups or couples.

the tea experience





The Peabody Memphis

149 Union Avenue • Memphis, Tennessee 38103
901-529-4188 • peabodymemphis.com

This luxury grande dame hotel is famous for the ducks who parade through its opulent lobby daily to the marble fountain, where they splash around happily for hours. A smartly uniformed Duckmaster escorts them from their "penthouse" on the roof, and then, after spa day concludes, takes them back up in the elevator, as wide-eyed children (and adults) crouch on the red carpet for close-ups. Gaze at the ornate stained glass lobby ceiling next to Chez Philippe, where afternoon tea is served amid gilded accents, crystal chandeliers, and Villeroy & Boch plates, and you may spot ducks in the design around the chandeliers (plus cherubs with the faces of the artist's grandchildren).



Chez Philippe is arguably the only French restaurant in the world without duck on the menu. Well, there is one: an adorable white chocolate duck, brushed with dark chocolate to resemble feathers and painted chocolate eyes, filled with chocolate ganache and pastry cream, which stars on the afternoon tea and lunch menus. The hotel's longtime pastry chef, Austrian-born Konrad Spitzbart, makes it (and, on the 75th anniversary of the Peabody ducks in 2008, cooked at New York's James Beard House).

"Mostly kids order our faux duck, and it's also popular for special occasions," says Executive Chef Keith Clinton, a former chef at Erling Jensen restaurant in Memphis, a French fine-dining restaurant. The \$59 afternoon tea offers a choice of 12 Rishi teas plus sandwiches such as crab salad, curried chicken croissant, prosciutto and melon, salmon mousse on pumpernickel, and tomato with cucumber. Fancy pastries include a chocolate opera cake; a Linzer cookie-inspired hazelnut, raspberry, and marzipan treat; cheesecake; chocolate ganache; and seasonal scones, such as a cranberry with peach, strawberry, or blackberry jam. A glass of Champagne is extra. A lighter Duckie Tea is offered for children ages 12 and younger.

"We're very particular that our food and service match this room and very posh environment," Keith adds. "We want guests to have an experience of true hospitality."

The Peabody Memphis serves afternoon tea from noon to 4:00 p.m., Wednesday through Sunday. Reservations are required.

(Opposite page) The Peabody Memphis is famous for its ducks, who parade to the lobby fountain on the red carpet daily at 11:00 a.m. (Top) Afternoon tea is served in Chez Philippe, its French restaurant in the lobby, amid opulent décor. (Left) The only duck on the menu at the storied hotel is a picture-perfect chocolate duck with brown feathers.

Photography Courtesy of The Peabody Memphis



Nostalgic Tea Rooms

684 West Poplar Avenue • Collierville, Tennessee 38017

901-613-4906 • nostalgictearooms.com

A delightful English family owns Nostalgic Tea Rooms inside Sheffield Antiques Mall in Collierville, a suburb about a half-hour drive from downtown Memphis. Sarah and Peter Norris and their daughter, Charlotte, offer an afternoon tea for \$39, which features three sandwiches (ham and apricot relish, cream cheese and cucumber, and egg salad), scones with clotted cream, and three desserts, such as mini Victorian sponge cake (a vanilla-based white cake with strawberry jam and butter icing), petite red velvet cake, and macarons. A cream tea of two scones with cream and strawberry jam for \$7.95 is also served. A choice of bagged English black teas such as Tetley's and Typhoo, Earl Grey, green tea, plus jasmine and lavender teas is included with both offerings.

"We're not a tearoom with lots of different teas. What I want is an experience, an environment where people talk to each other," says Sarah. "I've had afternoon tea all over the world, but to me, it's not just about the food, but how the people make you feel. Everyone says how friendly, really relaxing, and comfortable we are." Nostalgic has a European look because an Italian restaurant formerly occupied its space in the mall, which has more than 300 collectibles, jewelry, and furnishings dealers. The Norrises personalized it with English touches such as black-and-white Churchill teaware plus a bit of Paris.

The hands-on family has just one employee. "Peter does everything in the business, from cooking and making sandwiches to handling takeout. I do the baking—I've always loved making cakes; my mother used to make them all the time—and just walk around, see people, and smile," says Sarah (the hostess and server) modestly. Her husband, who's from Oxford, England, worked at Oxford University's Magdalen and St. Peter's colleges doing meal prep and bartending for student functions. Daughter Charlotte does the bookkeeping but has a day job.

The Norrises moved to Memphis in 2016 because Sarah, a nurse, accepted a job there. "I wanted our family to travel and see the world and other cultures, and there are many more opportunities here. I saw a different future for us." They planned to stay only three years. "But we fell in love with Collierville—it's a beautiful town with a historic district and its own square, a lovely family community. We bought a house and stayed."

Sarah, a nurse for 40 years as of 2026, still works three nights a week in a local hospital's operating room. She often shopped at Sheffield. "One day, when I saw its Italian restaurant closed, I said to Peter, 'I found it. We either do a tearoom now or never.'" In 2023, they opened Nostalgic, the mall's only eatery. "I can't express how nice people have been to us. Pretty much all our teaware has been gifted to us by thoughtful customers."

Nostalgic Tea Rooms is open from 11:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m., Tuesday through Saturday, and from noon to 3:00 p.m., Sunday. Reservations are required.



(Top) Fresh flowers adorn tables in Nostalgic Tea Rooms, located inside the Sheffield Antiques Mall in the Memphis suburb of Collierville. (Above, left) The Norrises, the tearoom's England-born owners, celebrate getting American citizenship.

Photography Courtesy of Nostalgic Tea Rooms

My Cup of Tea

3028 Carnes Avenue • Memphis, Tennessee 38111
901-614-9769 • shopmycupoftea.com

A tea company that sells 70 black, green, white, and oolong teas, plus rooibos and herbals in its gift shop, in more than 30 Memphis shops, and online, My Cup of Tea is a social entrepreneurship venture offering job training and skills development to women in its Orange Mound neighborhood. Fifteen Memphis-themed tea blends, such as Blue Suede Shoes Organic Wild Blueberry, Riverboat Queen Strawberry Green, 901 One of a Kind Coconut Almond, and Memphis After Dark Chocolate Mint, are in its tea line, and a wide variety of tea accessories—from tea cozies, towels, and aprons hand-sewn by its employees to teapots and flavored honey spoons—are also sold. Additionally, groups can book a private afternoon tea party with finger sandwiches, desserts, and savory bites for \$60 per person (extras like tea samplers are negotiable) or a tea tasting and talk about the teas' origins, in its restored 1902 house in the historic African American district.

"We bring out the silver, crystal, fresh flowers, lace—it really is lovely," says Carey Moore, who, with her husband, Rick, a retired chief executive of an asphalt paving company, convinced a tea company owner to sell them her business in 2015, after they first opened a resource center in the abandoned house they acquired. Teas from Asia are sorted, packaged, weighed, and shipped by employees. A contest for local artists to design a tea box that awards a \$2,000 prize to the winner, whose biography appears on the box, is in its fifth year. The artist keeps the copyright and serves as a judge on the panel who chooses next year's winner.

A mother of five, Carey had done volunteer work with women in India and Ukraine on church missions, often seeing the same city about 15 times. "I was always interested in ministering to women, because in the third world, women are often chattel. I acquired lot of tools and energy." When Rick got cancer in 2010, she decided to shift her attention to women in Memphis. But when she first opened her resource center, she was frustrated its drop-in nature didn't nurture the ongoing relationships with women she had overseas and wasn't enough to lift them from poverty. So, the Moores bought a tea company from a Junior League acquaintance of Carey's, hired local women, and were surprised and delighted when the majority kept the job for years. "The emphasis is joy and working together—the tea just floats the boat. We wanted to share an experience. We now have camaraderie," Carey says happily.

My Cup of Tea can serve afternoon tea to private groups January through October, twice a month. Reservations are required.

Photography Courtesy of My Cup of Tea



(Top left) Iced tea is served at a private event at My Cup of Tea, a tea company and social enterprise offering job training to local women. (Top right) Its Memphis-inspired tea blends include Blue Suede Shoes and Bluff City. (Above) A 1902 restored house is home. (Right) Carey Moore is My Cup of Tea's founder. (Below) Scones and fresh flowers are teatime staples.





The Woman's Exchange of Memphis

88 Racine Street • Memphis, Tennessee 38111 • 901-327-5681 • weofmemphis.org

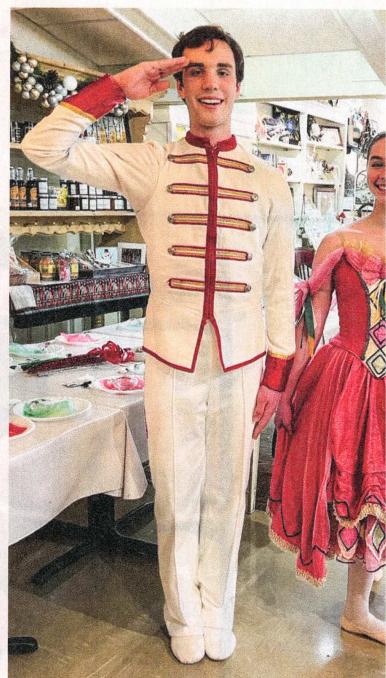
One of the city's oldest nonprofits, founded in 1885, The Woman's Exchange of Memphis hosts afternoon tea (as it has done for 65 years in its current location) on a quarterly basis to fundraise for its consignment shop, which sells handmade items. At its Valentine's Day Tea, Mother's Day Tea, Fall Garden Party, and Christmas Tea, plus an annual children's tea, volunteer members enthusiastically prepare most foods and serve them, clad in lace aprons and pearls over black attire, in the dining room and a room overlooking its garden.

Volunteers enjoy making their favorite recipes for the tea, which costs \$40. Sweets always include petit fours—"That's what I make," says Lana Owens, chairman of the Exchange's English tea committee since 2001—chocolate (such as a tart with whipped cream and strawberries), and sometimes a nut cookie (such as a pecan bar or an almond paste butter cookie rolled in powdered sugar), a cream puff, or a fruit-flavored cookie (such as lemon shortbread or cranberry pistachio). Savory bites include spiced cashews with rosemary, cayenne, and brown sugar, and cheese straws ("A Southern appetizer, almost everyone has recipes for it," Lana adds). Fruit skewers can feature strawberries, grapes, or pineapple. Exchange chef "Rev" Bailey prepares three sandwiches (always pimiento cheese, chicken salad, and cucumber), while a volunteer prepares a fourth sandwich, such as roast beef pinwheels with horseradish cream cheese. Chef Bailey also bakes scones, which are offered with clotted cream and strawberry jam.

Served in Churchill navy blue-and-white teaware, the tea is Buckingham Palace Garden Party, a blend of black and green tea with Earl Grey and jasmine notes from English Tea Store, inspired by the Queen of England's spring garden party at the palace, plus a second tea, such as pomegranate green or lemon-orange tea. Playful creative touches abound: sugar cubes are shaped in designs such as flowers or Christmas trees, while a color scheme accessorizes the food in icing and cake liners. Lavender, yellow, and hot pink prevailed at one fall garden party, and of course, red and green at the Christmas tea (held in late October, when the Christmas shop opens). "It depends on what flowers I can find," Lana says.

(Top) The Woman's Exchange of Memphis offers afternoon tea on a quarterly basis, served by volunteers who make sweet treats from their favorite recipes. (Bottom left) Blue-and-white Churchill dishes adorn the tables. (Opposite page, top left) A school theater troupe dressed as American Girl characters for tea. (Opposite page, top right) Ballet Memphis dancers performed at the children's tea, whose theme was "The Nutcracker Suite." (Opposite page, bottom right) Cheery cupcakes carry on the ballet theme.

Photography Courtesy of The Woman's Exchange of Memphis



The children's tea always has a theme and an activity. One year, the theme was American Girl dolls, so a school theater troupe dressed as the dolls, and there was story time for children, who brought their dolls. Since The Nutcracker was the theme another year, dancers from Ballet Memphis, dressed as nutcrackers from Tchaikovsky's famous ballet, taught the children steps. "It was just precious—it was such a hit," adds Lana.

"We exist to run a marketplace to generate income for women makers from seamstresses to artisans, who can be young mothers or the elderly. It was founded as an early version of women's empowerment," says Dena Ferrell Vance, executive director of The Woman's Exchange of Memphis, whose shop sells handmade clothing (which can be commissioned), jewelry, stuffed animals, housewares, candles, soaps, toys, and art. "We're known for heirloom children's clothing. We ship our christening gowns and bonnets worldwide."

Another gem at the Exchange is its cookbook, *Tearoom Treasures*. "It's a piece of Memphis history, recipes dating back generations in Memphis submitted by volunteers, like our famous corn soup and pimiento cheese sandwiches. You're getting about 100 years of local culture in one place here, it's so incredibly special. People think of music history when they hear Memphis, but arts of all kinds are strong and vibrant."

If you can't make the quarterly tea, don't fret. Lunch, served weekdays, features a hot entrée (a classic Southern "meat and two," such as beef tenderloin or fried catfish plus two sides), sandwich (like bacon, bell pepper, and Swiss), vegetable plate, and soup and salad from Chef Bailey, the Exchange's chef for more than 25 years and a former chef at the University Club of Memphis.



The Woman's Exchange of Memphis serves afternoon tea on one day each quarter, plus a children's tea in early December, at 2:30 p.m. Reservations are required. Its lunchroom is open 11:30 a.m. to 1:45 p.m., Monday through Friday, with reservations required for groups of six or more people.

Sharon McDonnell is a travel, food, drink, and culture writer in San Francisco. To read more of her work, go to sharonmcdonnell.contently.com.