

# Boulder-Dushanbe Teahouse

Boulder, Colorado

Historic Context and Survey



*Oil painting of Boulder-Dushanbe Teahouse by Barbara L. Hoffmann, 1998*

Prepared for the City of Boulder, Colorado  
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## INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

In 1987, the City of Boulder, Colorado received a remarkable gift from the City of Dushanbe, Tajikistan: a Tajik Teahouse for its use and enjoyment. After ten years of community debate, preparation and construction, the Boulder-Dushanbe Teahouse finally opened to the general public in May 1998.

Lara Ramsey and Kathryn Howes Barth, AIA, performed this study of the history and significance of the Teahouse as consultants to the City of Boulder Planning Department over the course of 2009 and 2010. Lara conducted historical research of the Teahouse gift, site selection and construction process and coauthored this report. Kathryn researched the architectural history of teahouses in general and specifically the Boulder-Dushanbe Teahouse. She reviewed oral histories of Tajik participants in the project, photographed the building, interviewed Vern Seieroe, architect for the project in Boulder, studied the Tajik and American drawings and related photos, and co-authored the report.

Chris Meshuck and James Hewat, City of Boulder Planning Department, coordinated the project, accepted original materials related to the teahouse construction, and reviewed the report.

The study included the examination of historic records, preparation of a Colorado Historical Society Building Inventory Record Form 1403, preparation of an historic background of the building, an architectural description, and an evaluation of the property's significance in terms of eligibility as a local landmark and for listing in the National Register of Historic Places.

Project kick-off began on November 7, 2008, with an informational slide show and meeting at the City Planning Department attended by Lara and Kathryn, Vern Seieroe, Andrea Witham, Mary Axe and city staff including Preservation Planners James Hewat and Chris Meshuck. Over the course of the project, a number of individuals who were involved throughout the Boulder-Dushanbe Teahouse project were contacted for information including: Vern Seieroe, Mary Axe, Roger Ewy, Scott Radersdorf, and Lenny Martinelli. Mary was invaluable in recalling the history of the project and Vern was invaluable in explaining the design and building process. George Peknik's book, *The Meaning of the Boulder-Dushanbe Teahouse*, was heavily relied upon as a well-researched and wonderful source of information regarding the teahouse.

Fortunately, the original architectural Tajik drawings (in Russian) for the building executed in Tajikistan and Vern Seieroe's drawings for the subsequent erection and adaptation of the building in Boulder, were available for study. The City of Boulder scanned the original hand-colored and other annotated blue-prints of the Tajik drawings and Seieroe's later drawings and made copies of them available to the consultants.

Documents at the Carnegie Branch Library for Local History were consulted, including oral history collections, city files, and photographs. The records of the City of Boulder Central Files were examined. There were no clipping files available for the Teahouse at the *Boulder Daily Camera's* archives. Newspaper articles were researched using online archives. The Internet and the search engine Google were used for keyword searches.

### *Related Searches*

A search of the files of documented historic resources at the Colorado Historical Society's Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation found no records for surveyed teahouses in the state.

A search of the National Park Service's National Register database revealed two listed "teahouses" in the United States. The Eugene J. De Sabla Jr. Teahouse and Tea Garden is located in San Mateo, California and was listed in the National Register in 1977. Built circa 1907, the teahouse and garden are "historically significant as an early expression of the influence of Japanese culture on the development of California design at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century."<sup>1</sup>



Fig.01 De Sabla Jr. Teahouse, California

The "Chinese Tea House," located on the grounds of the National Register "Marble House," is located in Newport, Rhode Island. This teahouse was built in 1913 and modeled after twelfth century Sung Dynasty temples of Southern China.<sup>2</sup>



Fig.02 Chinese Tea House, Newport, Rhode Island

To provide additional comparative information for evaluation, research was done concerning other teahouse buildings in the country. A Google search of teahouses resulted in two findings: an antique Chinese pavilion located in Tiverton, Rhode Island and the "Swallows' Rest" Teahouse in Newport News, Virginia. The antique teahouse in Rhode Island dates back to the 1800s. It was restored, disassembled and shipped from China to Tiverton in 2007 and located in the Tiverton Four Corners National Register Historic District. The teahouse is for sale and not a contributing building.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> National Park Service Website. [http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/feature/asia/2010/sabla\\_tea\\_house.htm](http://www.nps.gov/history/nr/feature/asia/2010/sabla_tea_house.htm)

<sup>2</sup> National Park Service, National Historic Landmark Nomination. <http://www.nps.gov/history/nhl/designations/samples/ri/Marble%20House.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Tiverton Four Corners Website. [http://www.tivertonfourcorners.com/press/chinese\\_tea\\_house.html](http://www.tivertonfourcorners.com/press/chinese_tea_house.html)



Fig.03 Antique Chinese Tea House, Tiverton, Rhode Island

The second teahouse is located in Newport News, Virginia. This teahouse was first constructed in 1988 at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC as the centerpiece of an exhibition on the ancient art of the tea ceremony. The thatched teahouse, called “Swallows’ Rest,” is a reproduction of a 17<sup>th</sup> Century, Ennan Teahouse located in Kyoto, Japan. After the exhibition ended, it was dismantled and rebuilt on the campus of Christopher Newport College. In May 2007, the building was relocated again to the Peace Garden at Newport News Park.<sup>4</sup>

The only known “Persian Design” teahouse outside of Central Asia is located in Klagenfurt, Austria.<sup>5</sup> The teahouse in Klagenfurt (one of Dushanbe’s sister cities) was originally built for an international exhibit in Poland. Afterward, it went to Algiers and then it came back to Dushanbe around 1988. After restoration work, it was sent to Klagenfurt. The Klagenfurt teahouse was designed and built by the same artisans of Tajikistan’s Artists Fund that built Boulder’s teahouse, but is one-quarter the size of Boulder’s.<sup>6</sup> Klagenfurt’s teahouse sits near a café and concert hall in the central part of the city and is “the only Persian teahouse in Europe.”<sup>7</sup>



Fig.04 Klagenfurt, Austria Teahouse

According to the Boulder-Dushanbe Sister Cities organization, the Boulder-Dushanbe Teahouse is the only Central Asian Teahouse in the Western Hemisphere and the first gift of an actual building between United States - Soviet Union sister cities.<sup>8</sup> At the time of the gift in 1988, Molly Raymond of the U.S. Information Agency stated: “nothing in the history of the Soviet-U.S. exchanges comes even close to this.”<sup>9</sup>

## HISTORY

<sup>4</sup> Newport News, Virginia Website. [http://www.newportnewsva.com/site\\_selection/economy/econnews.htm](http://www.newportnewsva.com/site_selection/economy/econnews.htm)

<sup>5</sup> The Meaning of the Boulder-Dushanbe Teahouse. George Peknik, 2004, Hoopoe Publications, pg. 112.

<sup>6</sup> Oral History Transcript, February 10, 1998, 055

<sup>7</sup> *Boulder Daily Camera* article, May 15, 1998

<sup>8</sup> Boulder-Dushanbe Sister Cities Newsletter, January 1989

<sup>9</sup> *Boulder Daily Camera*, Open Forum article by Mary Axe, December 21, 1988.

The Boulder-Dushanbe Teahouse construction was the result of a grass-roots effort by a dedicated group of Boulder citizens. Originally called the Soviet Sister City Project, in 1987 it was renamed the Boulder-Dushanbe Sister Cities when the “Agreement of Establishing Sister City Relations” was signed formally by the mayors of both cities.

## **Sister City Program**

### *1982-1987 Founding of Boulder’s Sister City Project*

During the winter of 1982-1983, Mary Hey and Sophia Stoller sought to develop a friendship and understanding between the people of Boulder and the citizens of a city in the then Soviet Union. Their primary goals were to establish a sister city relationship and develop educational programs focusing on the culture and history of the Soviet Union.

Early on they contacted Sister Cities International (SCI) for assistance in pairing Boulder with a similar city in the Soviet Union. SCI is a nonprofit network (funded in part by the U.S. State Department) that connects partnerships between U.S. and international communities. The sister city movement originated after the close of World War II when the mayors of two towns in France and Germany organized citizen exchanges to promote cultural understanding, friendship and peace.<sup>10</sup> SCI was formally established in 1956 by President Eisenhower in order to “promote peace through people-to-people contact” with all nations of the world.<sup>11</sup>

Boulder’s initiative to form a friendship with a Soviet city was in stark contrast to the political climate at the time. The Berlin Wall was firmly in place and the Soviet Union, which Tajikistan was then part of, was feared as a nuclear threat. During the 1980s through the early 1990s, the Cold War was winding down, yet the prospect of a war with the Soviet Union was still a threat. President Carter had called for military build-up and imposed sanctions against the USSR in reaction to its invasion of Afghanistan and the U.S. boycotted the 1980 Moscow Olympic Games. The arms race was advancing as President Reagan proposed the Strategic Defense Initiative (Star Wars) and Congress authorized missile procurement and development. By the mid 1980s, however, relations with the Soviets were changing. In 1985, Presidents Reagan and Gorbachev issued a joint statement of cooperation in arms reductions and in 1987 they signed the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, eliminating intermediate range nuclear weapons and agreeing to work toward further arms reduction agreements.<sup>12</sup> The Cold War ended in 1991 after the Soviet Union collapsed. Mary Axe recalls that “during the 1980s under Gorbachev, the policy of glasnost was introduced which resulted in more openness, greater freedom of information and a revival of ethnic identities within the various republics. Absent this window, I doubt that Boulder would have received a traditional Tajik/Central Asian Teahouse.”<sup>13</sup>

Sophia Stoller and Mary Axe organized the first meeting in February 1983 at Boulder’s Public Library to begin the process of selecting a sister city in the Soviet Union. The group called itself the “Soviet Sister City Project” and was an all-volunteer, non-profit, independent organization. Typically, sister city organizations are sponsored by the city government in which they are located. The group held monthly meetings to narrow down choices, as well as to better inform itself and the public about Soviet people and their culture. Dushanbe was unanimously selected

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<sup>10</sup> Mary Axe edits, June 2010

<sup>11</sup> Boulder-Dushanbe Sister Cities Memorandum, January 1989.

<sup>12</sup> [The Meaning of the Boulder-Dushanbe Teahouse](#), George Peknik, 2004, Hoopoe Publications

<sup>13</sup> Mary Axe edits, June 2010

on the advice of a local CU physicist, James Scott, who had visited the city and worked with colleagues there.

Dushanbe, the capital of the then Soviet Republic of Tajikistan, was proposed because of such commonalities as its being situated at approximately the same latitude, having a mountain environment, and serving as the home for universities and scientific research institutes. Mary Axe recalls that in order to pursue this city, the group knew they had to overcome one Soviet sister city policy: any city partnered with had to have a population of at least 100,000. At the time, Boulder's population was approximately 80,000. Several local scientists who traveled to Dushanbe on business during that time made a point to discuss the matter with the Mayor of Dushanbe, Mr. Nabi Shorakhmatov.<sup>14</sup>

While the Soviet Sister City Project was seeking a sister city abroad it was also lobbying Boulder city officials and leaders to support its efforts. Colorado Governor Richard Lamm wrote in a letter to the Soviet Sister City Project: "Your efforts to open channels of communication between the citizens of the Soviet Union and the citizens of the United States are vital steps in the long march toward world peace. It is the foundation of mutual understanding that a long lasting peace will eventually rest."<sup>15</sup> In 1984, Boulder's City Council unanimously passed a resolution endorsing the effort to establish a sister city relationship with Dushanbe.

Mary Hey, the first chair of the organization, traveled numerous times to the Soviet Embassy in Washington, D.C., pleading Boulder's case and providing information about the proposed partnership with little interest shown by the Embassy officials. Boulder's group continued to meet monthly featuring speakers who discussed topics as diverse as food and literature. Film festivals were held annually in partnership with CU's Film Studies program and the Boulder Public Library. The organization published a newsletter and built up its membership.

In August 1985, while attending a symposium in Dushanbe, Boulder scientist Joe Allen hand delivered a letter to Dushanbe's Mayor Shorakhmatov suggesting a sister city relationship.<sup>16</sup>

In April 1986, an executive vice-president of Sister Cities International traveled to Moscow to discuss establishing ten sister-city pairings, including Boulder. Six months later, Mary Hey traveled to Dushanbe delivering letters from Mayor Ruth Correll and the Boulder Chamber of Commerce, gifts and samples of Boulder's products, and children's art created especially for Dushanbe. Hey also suggested a visit by a Tajik delegation to Boulder. During this visit, Dushanbe agreed in principle to a sister city relationship.<sup>17</sup>

In the winter of 1986-87, Mary Hey traveled to the Soviet Embassy again, this time bringing with her a newspaper clipping of a Boulder High School Russian teacher who had organized a *Balalaika* band with his students. This captured the attention of Embassy officials and within a couple of weeks, the Boulder group received a notice from Sister City International that the Soviet policy on population requirements had been changed, allowing a partner city population of 100,000 or *possibly 80,000*.<sup>18</sup>

In May 1987, a formal "Agreement Establishing Sister City Relations" was signed by Boulder's Mayor Linda Jourgensen and Dushanbe's Mayor Maksud Ikramov during his visit to Boulder.

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<sup>14</sup> Mary Axe Interview, November 2008

<sup>15</sup> [The Meaning of the Boulder-Dushanbe Teahouse](#), George Peknik, 2004, Hoopoe Publications, pg. 107.

<sup>16</sup> [The Meaning of the Boulder-Dushanbe Teahouse](#), George Peknik, 2004, Hoopoe Publications, pg. 110.

<sup>17</sup> [The Meaning of the Boulder-Dushanbe Teahouse](#), George Peknik, 2004, Hoopoe Publications, pg. 108.

<sup>18</sup> Mary Axe Interview, November 2008

The stated goals of the relationship are those of citizen diplomacy: to promote international friendship, peace, and understanding. The sister city relationship with Dushanbe is recognized both nationally through Sister Cities International, agencies in the U.S. and Tajikistan, and locally through a protocol agreement between the governments of both cities.<sup>19</sup>

With the sister city relationship secured, the Soviet Sister Cities Project renamed itself the Boulder-Dushanbe Sister Cities (BDSC).

## **Dushanbe, Tajikistan**

Dushanbe, capital of the Republic of Tajikistan, is located in the Varzob River Valley beneath the snow-capped mountains of the Hissar Range, at the western edge of the Himalayas. Located at an elevation of approximately 2,500 feet, its climate is somewhat warmer than Boulder's (elevation 5,430), more like Albuquerque, New Mexico's. Both Boulder and Dushanbe have approximately 300 days of sunshine per year. Dushanbe has a population of over 600,000 and features wide, tree-lined boulevards and a mix of European-style and traditional Central Asian buildings, shops, Soviet-style apartment blocks, parks, teahouses, bazaars and cultural monuments.<sup>20</sup> Much like Boulder, Dushanbe is home to a major university and a number of scientific institutes and centers. Dushanbe means "Monday" and records show that as early as 1676, villagers from the surrounding area would bring their produce to market each Monday to two small towns that over time developed into the city of Dushanbe.

A more thorough overview and history of Dushanbe and Tajikistan can be found in George Peknik's book titled The Meaning of the Boulder-Dushanbe Teahouse.

### **1988-1990: Teahouse Gift**

It was during his 1987 visit that Dushanbe's Mayor Maksud Ikramov announced his plan to present to the people of Boulder a Tajik "Chaikhona." A *chaikhona* is a building unique to Central Asia where people gather to meet friends, play chess, enjoy a cup of tea and light snacks. "Choi" is the Tajik and "chai" the Russian word for "tea."<sup>21</sup>

Mayor Ikramov brought with him an agreement outlining proposed exchanges, the purpose of the group and a section outlining the gift of the teahouse and a promise that Boulder would give something in return. This document was edited for over three years as it traveled back and forth between the two cities. One section stated that the City of Boulder would donate the land for the teahouse, the BDSC would be responsible for the construction of the teahouse, and the City of Boulder would be the final owner.<sup>22</sup>

By December 1987 drawings for the Teahouse were completed in Dushanbe by architect Lado Shanidze and in April 1988 Tajikistan's Ministry of Culture approved the drawings and construction began. Construction of the Teahouse in Tajikistan was carried out by members of the Republic's Artists' Fund. In Tajikistan and throughout the USSR during the Soviet period, artists and architects were employed by the Artists' Fund, working at their facilities and receiving their supplies from the Fund. Following the break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991 and due to a drastically reduced budget for Tajikistan, the Fund was disbanded.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Boulder-Dushanbe Sister Cities Website, [www.boulder-dushanbe.org](http://www.boulder-dushanbe.org)

<sup>20</sup> The Meaning of the Boulder-Dushanbe Teahouse, George Peknik, 2004, Hoopoe Publications

<sup>21</sup> Boulder-Dushanbe Sister Cities flyer: "A Chaikhona (Teahouse)"

<sup>22</sup> Mary Axe Interview, November 1998

<sup>23</sup> Mary Axe Interview, November 1998

In October 1988, an official delegation from Boulder visited Dushanbe. Delegation members included local Boulder architect Vern Seieroe, Mayor Linda Jourgensen, Celeste Woodley of the Boulder Valley School District, and Mary Axe, chair of BDSC. During this visit, Seieroe accompanied Lado Shanidze to Leninabad, site of the Artists' Fund where the building was being constructed. He met several of the master craftsmen who were painting and carving various segments of the Teahouse.<sup>24</sup> The lavishness of the gift became apparent as Dushanbe officials described the 1,700 square foot Teahouse as one decorated with ornate carvings, tile mosaics, a decorative pool and statues.

Back in Boulder, citizens and city leaders were struggling with whether or not to accept the gift. One of the first committees formed late in 1988 was the Teahouse Taskforce, appointed by Mayor Jourgensen, charged with the task of determining the feasibility of accepting the Teahouse gift.

During the year of 1988, letters to local newspapers poured in and the contentiousness of the gift became apparent. Many felt that the gift would require an equally lavish reciprocal gift. Many citizens believed that the City should not spend a dime of public dollars on the Teahouse, given other community needs. Others were concerned about receiving a gift from Dushanbe because of its assumed role in the Soviet Union's prosecution of the war in Afghanistan and viewed acceptance of the gift as implicit acceptance of the Soviet government. In one article, Vern Seieroe countered, "the cost may be of concern to the giver, but what's relevant to the receiver is the cultural or educational value of the gift. This is more than a teahouse with a dollar value. This is a piece of Tadjik heritage. The design is exquisite; it's like a centuries-old mosque."<sup>25</sup>

After much debate and consideration and at the Taskforce's recommendation, the City Council voted 6-1 to accept the gift in May 1989 as "an important symbol of international friendship."<sup>26</sup> The Council also accepted the recommendation from the Taskforce that the Teahouse be located at one of three sites: next to the Boulder Public Library, in the East Boulder Community Park (which was under construction at that time), or west of the Criminal Justice Center at 11<sup>th</sup> Street and Canyon Boulevard.<sup>27</sup> The consensus favorite of the Taskforce was the municipal campus site, east of the Boulder Public Library.<sup>28</sup>

Now that the gift was officially accepted, in June 1989 the BDSC formed the Teahouse Trust as a 501c3 to oversee shipping, storing, fundraising, publicity, planning, construction, operation and maintenance of the Teahouse. This group consisted completely of unpaid volunteers.<sup>29</sup> While the City was to provide the land, the BDSC was hoping to raise \$200,000 for a foundation and the building's construction.

Vern Seieroe volunteered to ensure that the original drawings conformed to local building codes and the site. During 1989 and working with translators, Seieroe corresponded with Mayor Ikramov regularly to develop an understanding regarding the construction specifications of the Teahouse. Given that this was to be a joint effort, Seieroe's letters specified all aspects of the project to help clarify roles and responsibilities. Dushanbe planned to send a crew to Boulder to help assemble the Teahouse. During this planning period, communication with representatives from Dushanbe occurred weekly via telephone or telefax to discuss problems such as transportation. Originally, Dushanbe planned to pay to ship the Teahouse but with the Soviet

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<sup>24</sup> Boulder-Dushanbe Sister Cities Newsletter, January 1989.

<sup>25</sup> *Colorado Daily* article, October 31, 1988

<sup>26</sup> *Boulder Daily Camera* article, May 17, 1989

<sup>27</sup> *Boulder Daily Camera* article, May 17, 1989

<sup>28</sup> City Council Memorandum, April 10, 1991

<sup>29</sup> The Meaning of the Boulder-Dushanbe Teahouse, George Peknik, 2004, Hoopoe Publications and Mary Axe Interview 11/08

Union on the brink of collapse, Tajikistan's annual budget was essentially cut in half. Due to this financial exigency, the crates were repacked and the Teahouse Trust assumed the responsibility of paying for the shipping costs, deciding to use transportation by sea.

Over a two-year period from 1988 to 1990, Tajik artists and master-craftsmen constructed the Teahouse in Dushanbe and Khujand (Leninabad), Tajikistan. After the Teahouse was constructed, it was then disassembled, and sent to Boulder with a multitude of other components, arriving in early August 1990. The *Boulder Daily Camera* dubbed it the "Teahouse of the August Moon."<sup>30</sup>

Vern Seieroe and Mary Axe spent inordinate amounts of time at the home of Earl Sampson, CU Russian professor, trying to coordinate the shipment. Telephone calls were transferred from operator to operator: Dushanbe to Tashkent (in the Republic of Uzbekistan), Moscow, Pittsburg, Denver and finally Boulder. The 200 wooden crates containing the Teahouse traveled by train from Dushanbe to the port of Leningrad, by ship to New Orleans, and by six 20-foot tractor trailers to Boulder. The crates contained hand-painted ceiling coffers, fourteen red cedar columns, eight ceramic tile compositions, furniture including hand carved and painted octagonal tables and stools and bedlike seating structures called *topchans*, bronze sculptures of the Seven Beauties, teapots, cups, cozies, quilts, paint and paint brushes, and a *Kazan* (a metal structure for a wok for cooking Tajikistan's traditional, famous dish of Pilaf).

The City had fortunately just completed construction of a wastewater treatment plant off 75<sup>th</sup> Street with space for storage of the crates. The Teahouse Trust had raised over \$35,000, \$15,000 of which was used to pay for shipping costs.<sup>31</sup> The Mayor of Dushanbe stated that over 300,000 rubles had been contributed to its construction in Tajikistan, valuing the Teahouse at \$750,000.



Fig.05 Teahouse Crates Vern Seieroe, AIA, Photo

### **1990-1993: Site Selection**

On September 11, 1990 the final "Protocol" was signed by both Boulder and Dushanbe. Among items related to education, cultural exchange, science and technology, the Protocol specifically

<sup>30</sup> *Daily Camera* article, February 27, 1991

<sup>31</sup> [The Meaning of the Boulder-Dushanbe Teahouse](#), George Peknik, 2004, Hoopoe Publications

stated that Dushanbe would send the Teahouse to Boulder and that Boulder would “exercise their best efforts to install at a public location” and that BDSC would “exercise their best efforts to raise sufficient funds... for site and installations costs.” The Protocol specified that four persons would be sent from Dushanbe to help assemble and install the Teahouse. The Protocol also called for a reciprocal gift.<sup>32</sup>

Once the Teahouse actually arrived in Boulder and new information about its size and grandeur was received, planning efforts for its location began and fundraising continued. The Teahouse Trust displayed pieces of the Teahouse at the Hotel Boulderado, the Boulder Art Center, Boulder Creek Festival, weekly Farmers Market, and the Boulder Public Library in order to help raise the new estimate of \$350,000 needed to construct and maintain the Teahouse. Other fundraising activities included a concert by the winner of the 8<sup>th</sup> Van Cliburn International Piano Competition (1989) Alexei Sultanov of Uzbekistan, and a Ukrainian dance presentation. Vern Seieroe and Mary Axe made countless presentations during this time to civic organizations, schools, and City Council.<sup>33</sup> Celestial Seasonings placed membership forms in 300,000 of its tea boxes distributed nationally in an effort to raise money for the Teahouse Trust.<sup>34</sup>

In the City’s Planning Department, efforts were already underway on a Civic Center Master Plan (later renamed Civic Park Master Plan), a comprehensive look at the civic uses and public buildings in the downtown campus area. It made sense to consider the Teahouse in the context of these planning efforts. In December 1990, Mayor Leslie Durgin appointed a Teahouse Committee to take a fresh look at Teahouse site options and associated costs. It was clear that the City intended to provide the site and the BDSC intended to raise an estimated \$350,000 to construct the teahouse.

By April 1991, the committee had evaluated numerous sites and eventually narrowed it down to three sites within the Civic Center: 1) the center of 13<sup>th</sup> Street between Arapahoe and Canyon; 2) directly west of the Boulder Arts Center (BMOCA); or, 3) east of the Boulder Public Library. The committee also determined that the Teahouse should function as a food and beverage service operation.

At its April 16, 1991 meeting, the City Council determined that its preferred location for the Teahouse was 13<sup>th</sup> Street at Central Park, with its favorite location in the middle of a closed-off 13<sup>th</sup> Street, just east of Central Park.

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<sup>32</sup> September 11, 1990 Protocol

<sup>33</sup> Mary Axe edits, June 2010

<sup>34</sup> *Boulder Daily Camera* article, August 9, 1990

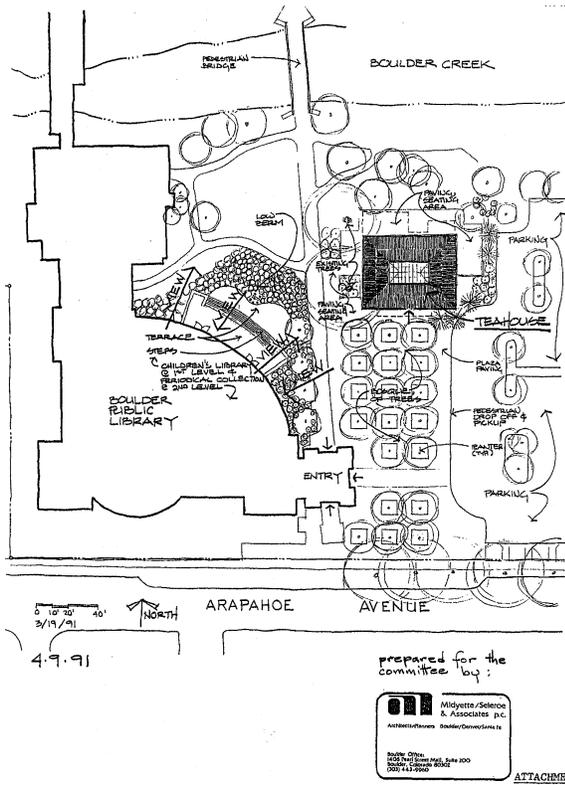


Fig.06 Proposed Teahouse Location East of Boulder Public Library City Council Memorandum April 10, 1991

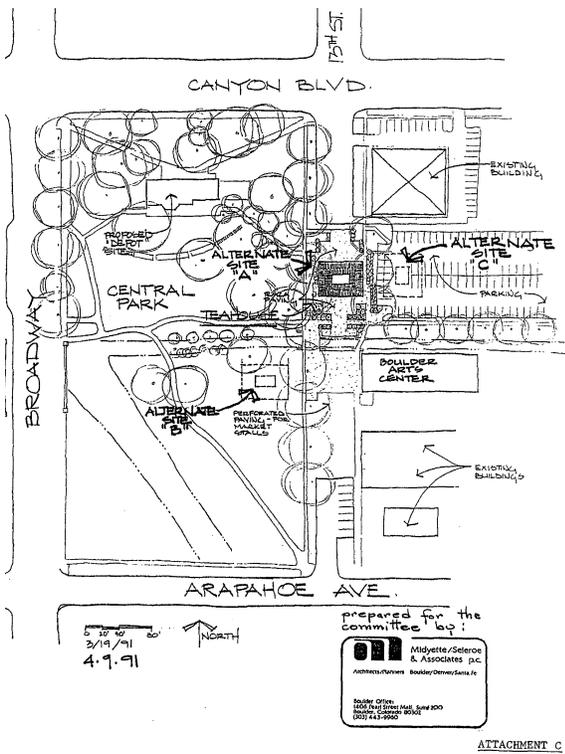


Fig.07 Proposed Alternative Teahouse Locations in Civic Park Plaza City Council Memorandum, April 10, 1991

In September 1991, the Civic Center Task Force was created to develop a Master Plan for the Central Park Area, including more specific analysis and siting of the Teahouse. After a frustrating December 1991 City Council meeting, Rosemary McBride, a local Boulder citizen, vowed to wear her colorful Tajikistan coat, presented to her during her recent visit there, until the Teahouse was erected.<sup>35</sup> McBride did in fact wear her coat to all public events until the Teahouse's opening in 1998.<sup>36</sup>

By January 1993, the Civic Park Master Plan was approved by City Council and in April 1993, the City Council voted to locate the Teahouse at 1770 13<sup>th</sup> Street. The plans for the area placed the Teahouse at the center of the Civic Park Plaza which included the Civic Plaza (the area to the north of the Teahouse site) which was to be used for Farmers Market exhibits and performances and the 13<sup>th</sup> Street Community Plaza (the street west of the Teahouse site) which was to continue to be used for public events such as the Boulder Creek Festival and the Farmers Market.

In October 1993, a week-long celebration of BDSC's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary and the Teahouse was held. Zubaidullo Zubaidov, then Chief of Protocol in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan, and currently Tajikistan's Ambassador to Russia, was the honored guest. Each day of the week a special presentation about Tajikistan was made by local experts: "Tajik Botany—from Tulips to Chrysanthemums" by landscape architect James M. Knopf who had traveled in Tajikistan; "Meadows in the Sky" by James B. Thompson, former superintendent of Rocky Mountain National Park; "The Teahouse and Its Past" by CU Professor of Fine Arts John D. Hoag; and "Central Asia and the Silk Road" by CU Professor of Art History Ronald M. Bernier. A dedication of the Teahouse site was presided over by Mayor Leslie Durgin and Boulder County Commissioner Homer Page, featuring the honored guest, Mr. Zubaidov. A brief groundbreaking ceremony took place with the dignitaries using a couple of new and shiny shovels. The week ended with a Tajik Feast held at the First Congregational Church with City Councilmember Sally Martin as M.C., Central Asian and Tajik music provided by local band Sol Spice, and featured guest, Mr. Zubaidov.<sup>37</sup>

### ***1994-1996: Finding an Operator***

In September 1994, with the site for the Teahouse finally selected, the City and the Teahouse Trust entered into a 20 year "Option and Lease Agreement" for the site on 13<sup>th</sup> street, allowing ample time for the Trust to fundraise and build the Teahouse and in turn rent it to a restaurant operator.

In May 1995, the Trust pursued and received a \$25,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to bring over four artisans to help assemble the Teahouse in Boulder.

As plans were developed, they were reviewed by city officials, the Downtown Design Advisory Board, and ultimately City Council. Vern Seieroe's challenge was "to take an open-air structure, enclose it, make it conform to American building codes and 'not compromise the integrity of the Tajik architect's traditional design.'"<sup>38</sup> "Seieroe traveled to Dushanbe to work with Tajik architect Lado Shanidze on the enclosure designs. The two conceptualized how the enclosed structure would look, but there were a few changes made along the way. The Fountain of the Seven Beauties. . . was originally planned as a square fountain recessed in the ground."<sup>39</sup> During

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<sup>35</sup> *Boulder Daily Camera* article, December 8, 1991

<sup>36</sup> Mary Axe, June 2010

<sup>37</sup> Mary Axe edits, June 2010

<sup>38</sup> *Denver Post* article, May 16, 1998

<sup>39</sup> *Boulder Weekly* article, March 29, 2007

the design phase, it was determined that more land area was needed to accommodate the kitchen/restroom addition.

On September 18, 1995 the Council approved an amendment to the lease agreement, allowing the Trust more land area to accommodate the Teahouse and the support building and to provide a greater set back from the ditch and plaza.

In late 1994 and early 1995, construction began on the Civic Plaza (located immediately north of Teahouse site) and the 13<sup>th</sup> Street Community Plaza (immediately west of Teahouse site). The Teahouse site was sodded and stubbed-out for future water, sewer, electrical and gas connections.

In the Spring of 1996, the Teahouse Trust found a local restaurant operator to run the Teahouse and arranged a consortium of six Boulder banks to loan \$1 million for construction of the Teahouse. Working pro bono, Pete Jensen of Chrisman, Bynum & Johnson drew up a sublease between a potential operator and the Trust. However, by Fall 1996 the Teahouse project hit a major roadblock when the City disclosed notification from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that the site was considered a superfund clean-up site, due to its past use as a coal gasification plant. The banks promptly withdrew the loan agreements.

Vern Seieroe and Mary Axe were at the “end of their rope.” They went to visit City Manager Tim Honey, who proposed borrowing from city funds to cover construction costs.<sup>40</sup> In October 1996, the City Council agreed to earmark a \$700,000 loan for the project from Windy Gap funds, which had resulted from the City’s 1996 sale of water rights. The City took the lead on the project and quickly hired an environmental consultant, Maxim Technologies, to complete a soils investigation of the site. A city-staffed project team was formed and included: Vern Seieroe, retained by city as project architect; Angela McCormick, project manager; Glenn Magee, general contractor and architectural project manager; Bill Hutson, construction site superintendent; Molly Winter and Ellen Cunningham, operator procurement; and, Benita Duran, public outreach.<sup>41</sup>

During the Winter of 1996, Celestial Seasonings offered to house and operate the Teahouse at its 40-acre site in Gunbarrel with construction costs borne by the Teahouse Trust. Council members entertained the idea due to concerns about potential vandalism, but ultimately decided to keep the Teahouse downtown for public enjoyment.

Finally, on March 18, 1997, the City Council formally approved an ordinance to fund construction of the Teahouse. By this time, the environmental consultant had determined that the site did not mandate clean-up under the present regulations, rather it was determined that the site would be excavated during the course of foundation work and soils properly disposed of.<sup>42</sup>

### ***1997-1998: Teahouse Construction***

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<sup>40</sup> Mary Axe Interview, November 2008

<sup>41</sup> Memorandum to City Council, November 19, 1996

<sup>42</sup> Memorandum to City Council, March 18, 1997

In April 1997, the City issued a Request for Proposal and Qualifications for a Teahouse operator. Three businesses submitted proposals and on May 9, 1997, the Teahouse Advisory Committee selected Lenny and Sara Martinelli to operate the Teahouse as a restaurant and café. The Martinelli's signed a lease agreement with the City on July 7, 1997.

On July 10, 1997 a second groundbreaking ceremony was held which drew about 200 people to the Teahouse site. On hand was Izatullo Khoshmukhamedov, former Trade Minister of Tajikistan; Leslie Durgin, Mayor of Boulder; Jim Pagliasotti, Policy Director, Office of Lt. Governor Gail Schoettler; Jane Healy, Senior Congressional Assistant, Office of Congressman David Skaggs; Mary Axe, Boulder Dushanbe Sister Cities; and, Vern Seieroe, Architect.

Workers assembled one of the ceiling coffers for the ceremony.<sup>43</sup> The *Denver Post* reported “the teahouse, the largest gift ever presented in the United States by a former Soviet state, should be ready for tea drinkers next spring.” Ruth Correll, former Boulder Mayor, called the Teahouse “a very small dent in a very Cold War.” The *Post* also reported that Mayor Leslie Durgin “read a letter sent to Boulder by state Senator Dorothy Rupert, which seemed to sum up everyone’s feelings. ‘Drinking tea together is a civil peaceful activity,’ Rupert wrote, ‘Hurry! Hurry!’”<sup>44</sup>



Fig.08 Groundbreaking Ceremony, Mayor Leslie Durgin and Mary Axe Vern Seieroe, AIA, Photo

While working to finalize plans, the City identified numerous cost overruns that could put the Teahouse costs at \$984,807. The plans were revised to bring the project back into budget: the support structure was redesigned to eliminate the basement and space in the kitchen area; the skylight and fountain were eliminated; the window design was modified; the color in the concrete floor eliminated; the pergola and elevated plaza were eliminated; and, the loading dock was deleted. Private funds were used to bring back the skylight and fountain.<sup>45</sup> A building permit was issued on July 16, 1997 and by September 1997 the Teahouse plans were revised and finalized. On September 17, 1997 the City began clearing the site with a projected completion date of May 14, 1998.

In December 1997 (with the help of the 1994 grant money from the NEA and assistance from the US Embassy personnel in Dushanbe) three artisans came to Boulder to assist with the Teahouse

<sup>43</sup> *Denver Post* article, July 11, 1997

<sup>44</sup> *Denver Post* article, July 11, 1997

<sup>45</sup> Memorandum to City Council, April 21, 1998

construction. Master woodcarvers Manon Khaidarov and Mirpulat Mirakhmatov along with Abdoukodir (Kodir) Rakhimov, plaster carver and painter stayed in Boulder homes while assembling the Teahouse and conducting several popular workshops on their specific crafts.<sup>46</sup> Manon and Mirpulat, along with Tajikistan's best artisans, had carved the twelve cedar columns for the Teahouse. They stayed in Boulder for three months helping assemble the Teahouse ceiling. Rakhimov, a well-known painter and master plaster carver, brought the abstract expressionists paintings with him to Boulder. For three months, he worked in a Boulder studio making eight plaster carvings, known as "ganch-kori." Three of the panels "frame his oil paintings, providing a contrast of old and new, as the latter are considered modern art."<sup>47</sup> In February 1998, Victor Zabolotnikov, who had created the eight colorful, ceramic panels for the building's exterior, arrived from Dushanbe to reassemble the dozens of segments and apply them to the exterior walls.

The craftsmen arrived with only blue pin-stripe suits in their luggage and the City outfitted them with insulated hats, coats and pants in preparation for the two months of construction during the cold winter.<sup>48</sup>

In Tajikistan, it had taken five woodworkers two years to create the Teahouse and seven workers two years to paint it. During his visit to Boulder, Mirpulat Mirakhmatov stated "since it was for America, we went all the way. It took two years from beginning to end."<sup>49</sup> City workers, contract laborers and Tajikistan artisans constructed the Teahouse in a little over ten months. As fate would have it, one of the City's construction crewmembers, Jamshid Drakhti (born in Tehran but residing in Gold Hill, Colorado) was fluent in Farsi and able to communicate easily with the Tajik artists in their native tongue as the Tajik language is a dialect of Persian. "Jamshid was like a son to the men and as much of the construction occurred during Ramadan, Manon and Miruplat were fasting. Jamshid's partner brought food and a samovar for tea to the site every evening for them to break their fast at sunset."<sup>50</sup>

Sadly, Mayor Maksud Ikramov, who originally conceived of the unusual gift for the sister city and the Teahouse's original architect, Lado Shanidze, both died before the project was completed.

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<sup>46</sup> The Meaning of the Boulder-Dushanbe Teahouse, George Peknik, 2004, Hoopoe Publications

<sup>47</sup> *Boulder Planet* article, February 4, 1998

<sup>48</sup> *Boulder Planet* article, December 1997.

<sup>49</sup> *Boulder Planet* article, December 1997.

<sup>50</sup> Mary Axe, June 2010



Fig.09 Manon Khaidarov and Mirpulat Mirakhmatov, 1997



Fig.10 Teahouse wood columns during assembly, 1997



Fig.11 Ceiling Coffers Under Construction, 1997



Fig.12, Abdoukodir Rakhimov, plaster carver, admiring carved column

## Dedication of the Teahouse

On May 15, 1998 a Dedication and Opening Ceremony celebrated the completed Teahouse. The Teahouse opened for business and public enjoyment on the following day.

Special guests at the ceremony included: Leopold Guggenberg, former mayor of Klagenfurt, Austria and his wife; Tajikistan's Ambassador to the United Nations, Rashid Alimov; United States Representative, David Skaggs, D-Colorado; Tajik artisans Mirpulat Mirakhmatov, Manon Khaidarov (who returned for the opening ceremony thanks to the generosity of the *Boulder Daily Camera* who purchased their airline tickets) and Kodir Rakhimov; and, Boulder Mayor Bob Greenlee.<sup>51</sup>

Prior to the opening, the *Boulder Daily Camera* Editor stated, "Next Friday, the teahouse – the largest gift ever given to an American city by the former Soviet Union – will open its doors for a grand tea party. We tip our hats to the many people who were responsible for making the teahouse a reality. Heading the list is Mary Axe, who never gave up the fight to get the teahouse pieced together and opened as a Boulder landmark."<sup>52</sup>



Fig.13 Opening Ceremony (left to right)  
Leopold Guggenberger, Manon Khaidarov, Rashid Alimov, Mirpulat Mirakhmatov



Fig.14 Opening Ceremony, Mary Axe

<sup>51</sup> *Boulder Daily Camera* Editorial, May 1998

<sup>52</sup> *Boulder Daily Camera* Editorial, May 1998



Fig.15 Jamshid Drakhti (far rear), Miruplat Mirakhmatov, Victor Zabolotnikov, Vern Seieroe, Manon Khaidarov  
Exact date unknown (sometime after opening)