

Project Plan

Tea Tree, Tea Treaty

(Naardermeer theehuis)

Haruka Matsuo



Tea ceremony by Haruka Matsuo at the IJsselbiënnale in Deventer

Summary

The project *Tea Tree, Tea Treaty* (Naardermeer theehuis), initiated by Haruka Matsuo — a Japanese artist/designer, ceramist, and tea master living and working in the Gooi region — aims to develop a contemporary teahouse at the Meentwerf in Hilversum, a place for artistic and cultural exchange with a social function. Specifically, the project seeks to explore how the essence of a traditional teahouse can be reinterpreted for modern society, while establishing connections to the community, soil and history of the Naardermeer area. The teahouse will be constructed entirely from recycled materials — including some original components from the Meentwerf Building, which was formerly a fire station — and local Naardermeer clay.

Community involvement will play a key role in both the design and construction, actively engaging diverse groups such as people with early-onset dementia (through collaboration with the King Arthur Groep) and those with visual impairments (via ICEVI-Europe). Once complete, the teahouse will become a space for reflection and connection through tea ceremonies and workshops, aimed at vulnerable groups in the Gooi region, such as people with a disability and those who feel socially isolated. These sessions will be supervised by Mirjam Albada Jelgersma, a psychologist local to the Gooi region specialising in inclusion and equality. Researched and documented through video, photos and an essay, the project will be presented in 2025 at various art and design events.



Tea ceremony by Haruka Matsuo

Introduction

The project *Tea Tree, Tea Treaty* (Naardermeer theehuis) has been initiated by Haruka Matsuo, a Japanese artist/designer, ceramist and tea master living and working in the Gooi region. Her work, consisting of ceramics, drawings, installations and tea ceremonies, concentrates on that which is not tangible yet present, such as reflections in water, the atmosphere between objects, and the connection between people and/or between people and places. While incorporating a location's history and its associated stories into her work, Haruka brings attention to the here and now, allowing observation of how the narrative of a place affects the present moment.

A traditional Japanese tea ceremony responds to the environment. It is about sharing time and space in connection with nature. Therefore, Haruka always uses local materials. For instance, for a tea ceremony at Het Pinetum in Hilversum, she used local sand as a mould for the plate on which the sweets were served. For another ceremony, at the IJsselbiënnale in Deventer, Haruka made a teapot from local clay she dug up from the 'uiterwaard' — the area between the summer and winter dykes by the IJssel River, where water collects when the water level is high — and she made glazing from the ash of local trees. The tea ceremony does not force anything; it is a whole different way of connecting. Talking is not necessary (but allowed). The ritual constitutes a form of meditation that expands attention and helps bring this attention into daily life through an everyday means: tea.

Until now, Haruka performed all her tea ceremonies outdoors. At the IJsselbiënnale, she performed her tea ceremony ten times in the same spot. After the fourth or fifth time, she noticed how the location began to constitute a space where participants more readily fell into a meditative state. This shows that concentration lingers — it is intangible and invisible, but present. The space between the corn plants became a small cosmos affecting how people moved, breathed, and how they felt.

With her new project, the *Tea Tree, Tea Treaty*, Haruka aims to explore how a physical space — through its design, layout, and materials — can enhance participants' sense of connection during the ceremony. She does this by creating a site-specific teahouse based on traditional Japanese principles adjusted to society today: a teahouse for energy to linger, embedded in the found materials it is constructed with and added to by its visitors, who subtly evolve the space with their presence.



Traditional Japanese teahouse

Stichting Meentwerf, where the teahouse will be located, serves not only as a place for artistic and cultural exchange but also has a social function. The foundation actively seeks interaction with local residents, including refugees from Gaza and Syria. Additionally, it hosts activities for people with early-onset dementia, organised by the King Arthur Groep. In collaboration with this organisation, Haruka will involve people with early-onset dementia in the creation process of the teahouse. They will be invited to join Haruka in collecting clay from the Naardermeer and building an earthen wall in the teahouse – gathering old memories from the lakebed and embedding them into the wall.

As a ceramist, Haruka has extensive experience in working with local clay that she sources herself from lakes and canals. Additionally, Haruka is part of the Stichting Matsuo Form Art, offering workshops to people with visual or physical impairments or intellectual disabilities. During these workshops, participants learn to make teapots and cups by sensing the material through touch rather than sight.

The wall, made by people with early-onset dementia under supervision of Haruka, will be constructed through a process of layering clay, with intervals for drying. Each return to the site will add to a series of moments, imprinted into the physical memory of the clay wall. This engagement not only provides a creative outlet for participants but also addresses their desire for connection and well-being. By actively participating in the construction, individuals will experience a sense of accomplishment and ownership, which can enhance their self-esteem and overall mood, while the shared experience of working together fosters social bonds. Moreover, the evolving wall serves as a living reminder of their contributions and memories, reinforcing their sense of identity and belonging within the community.

Additionally, through ICEVI-Europe, people with a visual impairment will be invited to create teacups using clay from the Naardermeer, allowing them to feel and shape the material with their hands. This tactile experience is not only creative but also provides a sense of accomplishment and connection to the process. As they work on their teacups, the participants will have the opportunity to share their experiences and ideas with others, cultivating social



Tea cup



Clay wall



Finding and using local clay to make tea ceremony utensils

interaction and community ties. This collaborative aspect reinforces their sense of belonging and supports their emotional well-being, as they contribute to a shared artistic goal. Additionally, participants will gain a sense of accomplishment by creating functional objects, boosting their confidence and pride. The final teacups will serve as a tangible reflection of their journey and involvement in the project, enhancing their overall well-being and enriching their creative development in a supportive and inclusive environment.

The local clay used for the project provides a sustainable alternative to store-bought options. While commercial clay corrodes mountains and causes significant ecological damage, and Japanese clay resources — particularly porcelain made from stone powder — are running out, mud from local sources such as the Naardermeer is continually replenished, making it a more environmentally friendly choice.

The ground beneath us is fundamental to our existence. It provides the foundation for life — from the water we drink to the food we eat: everything comes from the earth. When the ground is damaged or exposed, life becomes vulnerable. In Japan, earthquakes and tsunamis have shown how quickly the world can be swept away. In the Netherlands, the ongoing effort to reclaim land and keep water at bay demonstrates a constant interplay between land and water — the elements that sustain us. *Tea Tree, Tea Treaty* seeks to remind us of this connection: sipping tea, brewed with water, from a cup made of local clay and sitting beside an earthen wall, one is intimately linked to the soil beneath and the water in the surrounding landscape.

The Meentwerf is a five-minute walk away from grasslands and shallow ponds that play a role in the ecological connectivity between the Naardermeer, a significant lowland peat bog area recognised for its high ecological value, and the Ankeveense Plassen. Walking through this area before entering the teahouse aligns with the Japanese tradition in which a winding garden path leading to the teahouse serves as mental preparation before the ceremony.

The tea served at the ceremony is different from the traditional matcha tea (made from powder) used in most Japanese tea ceremonies. Haruka is the only tea master in Europe who performs leaf tea ceremonies, practising the Oubaku Baisa Ryu tradition under tea master Jyun-shihan.



Stichting Meentwerf



The Naardermeer behind the Hilversumse Meent

This type of ceremony requires forty objects, all of which she makes herself. One of the reasons Haruka chose to specialise in leaf tea ceremonies is because it allows her to use local plants and flowers, such as buckwheat, that she grows on location or forages in the area. Even the water, taken from the Naardermeer and purified for drinking, is sourced locally. This way, all components in the project – the makers, the hut, the utensils, and the tea itself – are integrally connected and oriented to their immediate environment.

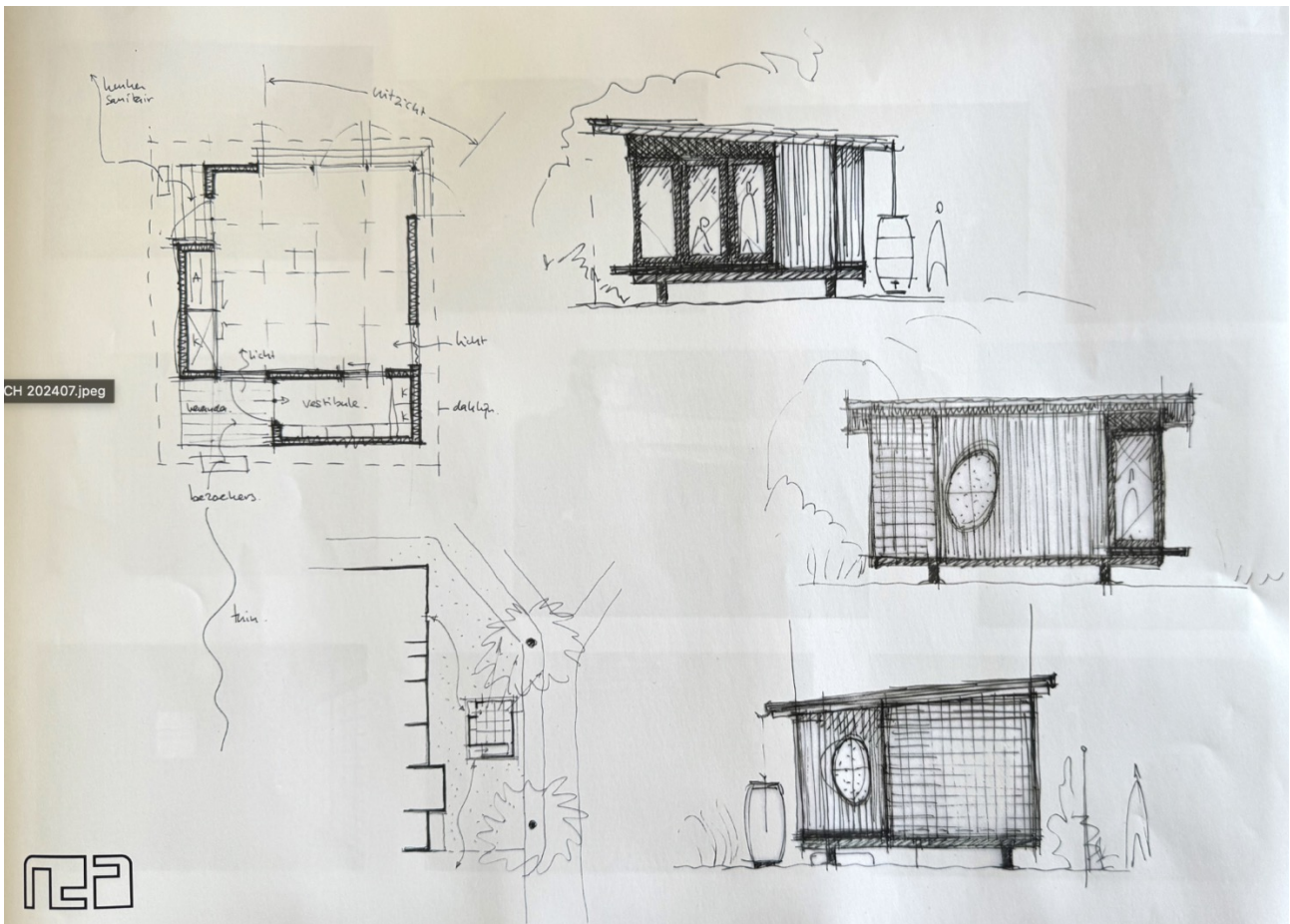
Plan

To build the teahouse, Haruka will collaborate with architect Barry van Waveren, an environmental thinker with five years of experience in using found materials, based in Amsterdam. He specialises in ‘egoless building’, aimed at creating spaces that allow people to reconnect with a sense of community and humanity, leading to a more authentic and unified experience of themselves and those around them. With this approach, he aspires to diminish the emphasis on the individual ego and promote collectivity.

David Dijkhoff is a set and lighting designer based in Bussum. In addition to his design work, David is skilled in hands-on construction. He has previously collaborated with Haruka and will now contribute to the construction of the teahouse. Additionally, he will offer guidance as a scenic coordinator.

The teahouse will be constructed in the garden of Stichting Meentwerf, a creative hub located in the Hilversumse Meent, where Haruka has her studio. Meentwerf serves as a vibrant community space where people of all ages and backgrounds can engage with cultural and artistic practices. The teahouse will be constructed entirely from recycled materials, including some original components from the Meentwerf building, which was formerly a fire station.

The *Tea Tree, Tea Treaty* project began in late 2024 with a design phase (preliminary research) led by Haruka Matsuo in close collaboration with Barry van Waveren (architect) and David Dijkhoff (scenic coordinator & construction lead). The initial sketches have generated ideas on integrating local materials and sustainable practices, leading to a preliminary design. In 2025,



Sketch by Barry van Waveren

Haruka and David will assess which reusable materials are available through donations or demolition projects, after which Barry will select those that best fit the design. The collection and transportation of these materials will be supported by community volunteers, whose feedback will also be incorporated into the evaluation to ensure that the chosen materials and methods align with the project's ecological and thematic principles. Once these choices are confirmed, Barry will develop the final design, incorporating the collected materials and building elements.

Once the design & sourcing of materials has been completed, it will be time to start the construction phase and put spades in the ground. This begins with clearing and levelling the site at Stichting Meentwerf. Once the ground is even, the foundations can be laid. Next, the main construction phase will take place in two stages. Led by Haruka, David, and a team of volunteers, the first stage will focus on building the structural frame, which will give the building its shape and strength – essentially the skeleton of the building. The second stage will involve adding the exterior elements, including walls and a roof, making the building watertight, and transforming the teahouse into a cozy, inviting space. Throughout this process, community involvement remains central, and co-working days will facilitate collaboration with external partners. Barry will oversee the technical and design aspects, ensuring alignment between design and execution and maintaining technical quality.

After the main construction of the teahouse, the internal finishing of the teahouse begins, meaning the construction of the interior. In collaboration with the King Arthur Groep, people

with early-onset dementia will be invited to join Haruka in gathering local clay from the Naardermeer and building an earthen wall in the teahouse. People with a visual impairment will be invited to create cups and other tea utensils using this local Naardermeer clay, feeling and shaping the material with their hands.

Once the structure and tea utensils are complete, the teahouse will become a space for reflection and connection. Haruka will lead tea ceremonies in two phases. The first will focus on isolated and vulnerable groups, such as those with early-onset dementia (through the King Arthur Groep) or a visual impairment (in collaboration with ICEVI-Europe) and their caregivers ('mantelzorgers'). These sessions will be led by Dr Mirjam Albada Jelgersma. Other sessions will focus on local refugees and those granted asylum ('statushouders').

In the second phase of the tea ceremonies, Haruka will reach out to a broader public across the country. At the same time, efforts will be made to actively engage specialists from psychology, medicine, and environmental sciences to promote interdisciplinary exchange. Additionally, the teahouse will be used for educational and care activities in collaboration with the King Arthur Groep (for people with early-onset dementia) and other partners.



Situation Hilversumse Bovenmeent 2017 (Source: Cyclomedia)



Topographical map Hilversumsche Meent (1948) and subdivision thereafter (1949)

The final tea ceremony will be an exploratory session centred on contemplative dialogue, bringing together eight specialists and selected members of the public. This ceremony will take place in silence, enriched by the surrounding sounds of nature and water, creating an atmosphere in which participants can experience the subtle, shared connection with each other and with nature. This will be followed by a reflective conversation. To preserve the experience, the sounds, movements and dialogues will be captured through video, photography, and audio, as well as an exploratory essay by Daphne de Sonnevle. These will be presented in 2025 at several art and design events.

In addition to the tea ceremonies, the veranda of the teahouse will be open to visitors from Wednesday to Sunday for three months following its completion. From the veranda, a window will provide visual access into the teahouse. After this period, tea ceremonies will continue to take place, albeit less frequently. Additionally, opportunities are being explored for other uses, such as educational and care activities, in cooperation with Stichting Meentwerf and other partners.

Diversity and inclusion

Diversity and inclusion are at the core of the *Tea Tree, Tea Treaty* project, not only in terms of design but also through the involvement of a wide range of participants, collaboration partners and audience members. By involving people from different cultural, social and demographic backgrounds, the project aims to cultivate a sense of belonging. This is achieved in the following ways:

Team composition and collaboration partners: the project's core team brings together a diverse group of experts, each contributing unique perspectives to the design process. Haruka Matsuo, a Japanese designer and tea master, collaborates with Dutch architect Barry van



King Arthur Groep

Waveren. Additionally, local psychologist Dr Mirjam Albada Jelgersma, known for her work in diversity, inclusion, and equality, supervises the participation of people with early-onset dementia (reached through the King Arthur Groep). This interdisciplinary and intercultural collaboration enriches the design process and ensures that the project is informed by a wide range of perspectives.

Engaging marginalised communities: a key focus of the project is the active inclusion of groups who are often underrepresented in design projects. People with early-onset dementia (in collaboration with the King Arthur Groep) and those with a visual impairment (through ICEVI-Europe) are invited to participate in the construction process. They will help make the mud wall and craft cups and other tea utensils.

Audience diversity: the teahouse is designed to serve a broad audience, with the aim of reaching people from different regions and demographics. Special ceremonies will be held for isolated and vulnerable groups, such as refugees living in the area, facilitated through Stichting Meentwerf (which already organises activities for these communities). While the local community in the Hilversumse Meent plays a central role, the project also welcomes participants from across the Netherlands through collaborations with external partners.

Accessibility: to ensure the inclusiveness of the project, physical and sensory accessibility are central to the design of the teahouse. Collaborating with ICEVI-Europe and other care networks, the project makes provisions for participants with disabilities, ensuring that the space is welcoming and usable for all. The use of local clay and natural materials also reflects a commitment to ecological and sustainable practices, cultivating a sense of inclusivity that extends beyond people to encompass the natural environment itself.

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