



Kikisake-shi (sake sommelier) Jesse Matsuoka made it his mission to bring sake to the masses. “I was mind-boggled by the history,” says the Sen’s (senrestaurant.com) second-generation restaurateur of his visit to Japan’s sake breweries. He admits that some may find sake intimidating—until now.

Matsuoka launched the American Sake Association (americansakeassociation.org) to encourage formal sake education, and a basic primer is enough to understand the sake-making process. Sake’s four essential ingredients (water, rice, koji and yeast) each impact the final product. Water is often sourced from

freshwater streams or aquifers, its minerals providing nourishment during the brewing process. Milling the rice removes proteins and fats, and also concentrates flavor, while koji (a type of mold) converts the remaining starches into sugar. The final addition of yeast affects the sake’s bouquet. Distilled alcohol may be added as a final step.

Most consumers look at the number on a sake bottle, which reflects the percentage of rice that hasn’t been polished: Junmai (70%), Gingo (60%) and Daiginjo (50%). Matsuoka says price doesn’t tell the full story. “Don’t think expensive is better,” he suggests. “Think about what you usually drink and you can find a parallel within the sake world.”

Like This? Drink That

A Sparkling Swap: Hakkaisan AWA

“Awa” means bubbles in Japanese. Hakkaisan Brewery’s new creation features méthode champenoise (natural bottle fermentation) to create delicate bubbles with a crisp, dry finish.

Retire Rosé: Amabuki Junmai Ginjo Nama

This 325-year-old sake brewery’s recent creation uses strawberry flower yeast to create a fruit-forward, beautifully balanced and food-friendly sake.

Whiskey? Why Bother: Kikusui Funaguchi Nama Genshu

This full-throttle sake, widely known as the “yellow can,” is easy to drink and delivers voluptuous smoky and nutty notes. And at 20% alcohol, it gets the party started fast.



Sake Surge

MOVE OVER, ROSÉ. SAKE IS BECOMING THE EAST END’S ULTIMATE LIBATION THANKS TO JESSE MATSUOKA.

BY MATTHEW WEXLER
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