



THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO SAKE



VINE
CONNECTIONS



JAPAN MAP

BREWERY & DISTILLERY PREFECTURES



VINE CONNECTIONS

PREMIUM JAPANESE SAKE FACTS

700 A.D.

YEAR SAKE IS BELIEVED
TO HAVE ORIGINATED
IN JAPAN

1,000

NUMBER OF SAKE
BREWRIES IN
JAPAN TODAY



55%

OF JAPAN'S FARMLAND
IS RICE PADDIES

15%-17%

AVERAGE ALCOHOL
BY VOLUME IN SAKE

LESS THAN 6%

OF ALL JAPANESE SAKE IS
CONSIDERED SUPER PREMIUM

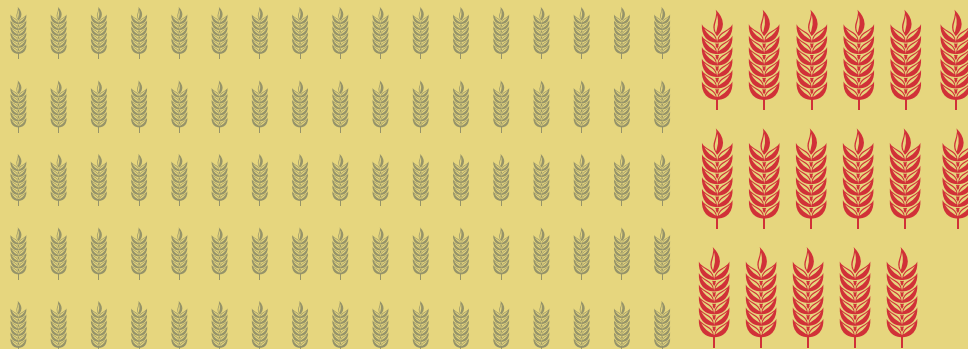
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NUMBER OF PREMIUM
SAKE IMPORTED BY
VINE CONNECTIONS

SAKE RICE VARIETIES IN JAPAN

TOTAL ~ **100**

USED IN VINE CONNECTIONS SAKE = **17**



SAKE RICE VS. TABLE RICE



HEIGHT:

sake rice is at
least 25% taller
than table rice



WEIGHT:

sake rice is
heavier (weighs
25-30 grams)



WIDTH:

a grain of sake
rice is 20% larger
than table rice



CONTENT:

sake rice has more
starch, less fat, &
less protein

SAKE GRADE LEVELS

NON JUNMAI

Brewed using Rice,
Water, Koji Mold,
& Distilled Alcohol

JUNMAI

Brewed using Rice,
Water, & Koji Mold only
(NO Distilled Alcohol)

RICE MILLED TO:

AT LEAST **50%**
(50% or more
milled away)

DAIGINJO

JUNMAI DAIGINJO

AT LEAST **60%**
(40% or more
milled away)

GINJO

JUNMAI GINJO

AT LEAST **70%**
(30% or more
milled away)

HONJOZO

JUNMAI

FUTSU "TABLE SAKE"

Table sake often uses
automated brewing
processes and high
amounts of distilled
alcohol.

FUTSU "TABLE SAKE" NO MINIMUM REQUIRE- MENTS

Futsu represents about 75%
of the entire sake market.

Increasing quality, price, fragrance, complexity

SUPER PREMIUM

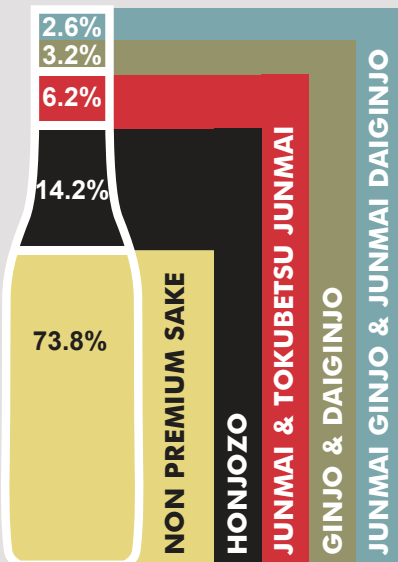
PREMIUM

LOW GRADE

high quality

ALL SAKE MADE

low quality



INFOGRAPHIC PROVIDED BY VINE CONNECTIONS
for more information visit vineconnections.com





VINE CONNECTIONS SAKE PORTFOLIO

A comprehensive portfolio offering everything from the highest quality everyday sake to the ultimate drinking experience.

We have selected top breweries from 13 different Japanese prefectures spanning the entire country, from Hokkaido to Kyushu.

Vine Connections is the leading U.S. authority on Japanese sake and is known for its consistency of quality, supply, and price stability. Our approachable sake education, innovative marketing and packaging, and sales materials truly set us apart from our competitors.



ABOUT VINE CONNECTIONS

Vine Connections leads the charge for representing sake and wines that change minds – unearthing high quality sake and wines, regions, and people who inspire you to become part of the VC movement.

Vine Connections is one of the leading authorities and educators in the U.S. for Japanese ginjo sake, along with premium wine from Argentina, Chile, and California.

Based in Sausalito, California, Ed Lehrman and Nick Ramkowsky pioneered the first nationally-imported portfolio of artisan wines from Argentina in 1999, and then introduced Japanese ginjo sake from 11 brewers in 2001. These small, traditional family brewers produce the world's most delicious premium sake. In 2013, Vine Connections' "The New Chile Portfolio" revolutionized the category with boutique wines from Chile's diverse appellations. VC also represents a set of unique and innovative California wines.

Vine Connections champions regions and people that deserve to be known.

- UNCORK THE UNEXPECTED -



VINE CONNECTIONS

SAKE SENSEI



NICK RAMKOWSKY, the co-founder and owner of Vine Connections, has an extraordinary enthusiasm for championing unknown regions.

Nick started working as a wine buyer at North Berkeley Wine, a well-known wine shop in the Bay Area, while attending UC Berkeley. Upon graduation, Nick moved to France for a year to explore its wine country, and later began working in wholesale distribution when he returned to the US. He started Vine Connections with Ed in 1999 after a trip to Argentina where they had a vision of the great future of that wine country. Soon after, the company seized the opportunity to import sake and became leading experts in the premium ginjo category.

Nick is a visionary who leads VC's portfolio development, sake and wine quality, supplier relations, and sales strategy.



ED LEHRMAN is the co-founder and owner of Vine Connections, and he pairs a passion for sake and wine with a keen business acumen.

Ed's wine career started at the New York premier wine shop, Sherry-Lehmann, after he graduated from Duke University. He soon made it to California to get his MBA at UCLA before moving to SF to work at Kendall-Jackson and later Seagram Classics. He started his first business, Passport Wine Club, in 1994 and Nick became one of his main wholesale suppliers. Ed's sake epiphany came in 2001 at a dinner in SF where he tasted his first group of incredible ginjo sake with several Japanese brewers.

Based in the Sausalito office, Ed is involved in the day-to-day management of Vine Connections. He leads long-term strategy development and oversees all departments.



MONICA SAMUELS is one of the country's most accomplished sake professionals and leads the Vine Connections team through education, marketing, and sales to drive retail, restaurant, and consumer demand.

With over 9 years of experience, Monica brings a unique perspective to the industry. She was the Sake Ambassador at Southern Wine & Spirits in New York as well as the Corporate Sake Sommelier at the Sushi Samba restaurant group. She has a unique understanding of pairing sake with food, particularly outside of traditional Japanese settings.

Monica holds several professional sake honors, including an esteemed judging role for the annual US National Sake Appraisal. She was recently named a "Top 40 under 40 – America's Most Influential Tastemakers" by Wine Enthusiast Magazine. Additionally, Monica is a Level 3 Certified Instructor for the Wine & Spirit Education Trust (WSET) and has lectured on sake for the Culinary Institute of America's academic program.



JOHN GAUNTNER is recognized as the world's leading non-Japanese sake authority and expert. John was instrumental in compiling the Vine Connections sake portfolio. A long-time resident of Japan, he has written several books and articles about sake and is often regarded by the industry as the person who made sake popular outside of Japan.

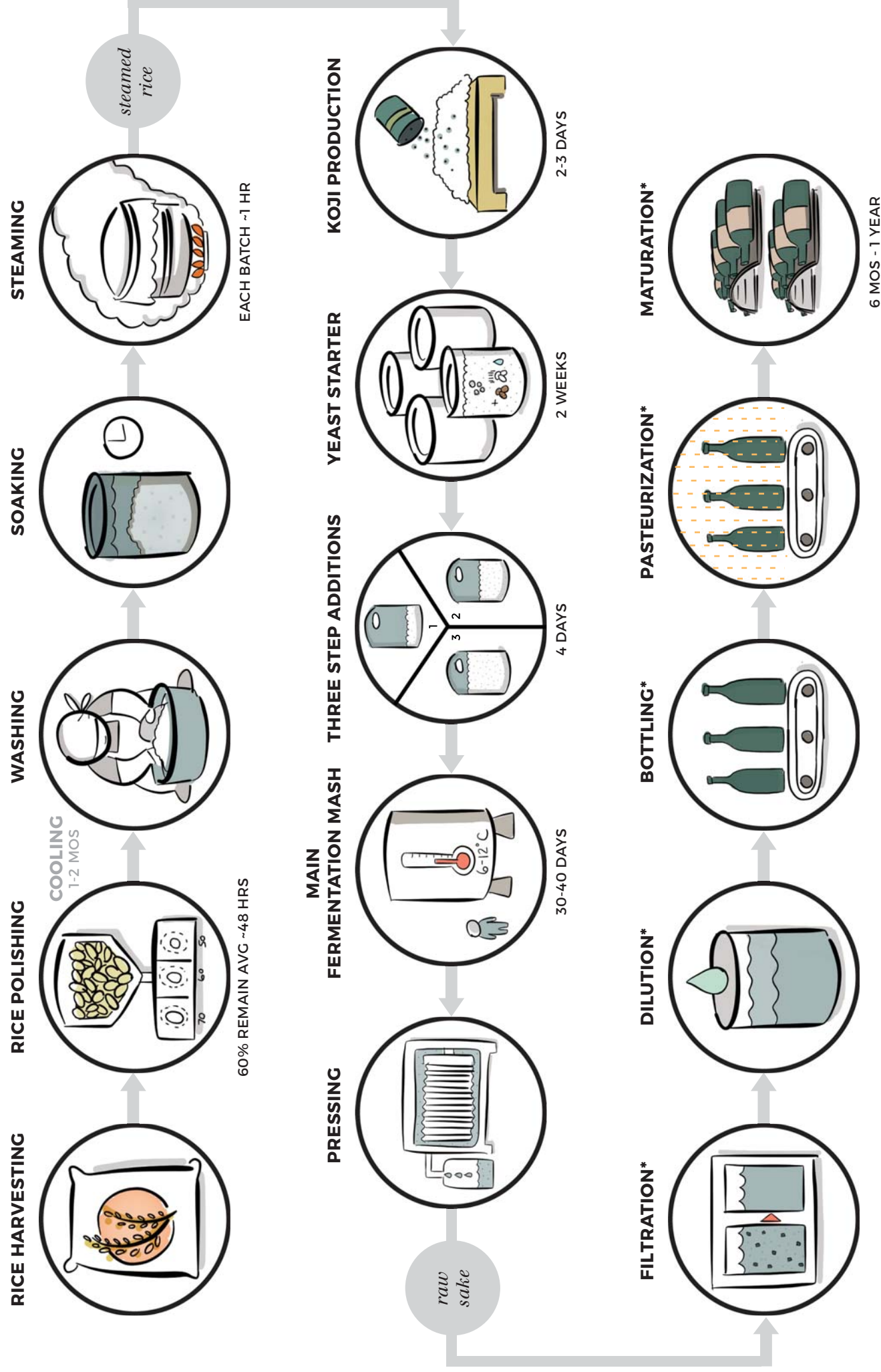
John is the only non-Japanese certified Master of Sake Tasting in the world and has also achieved the very difficult Sake Expert Assessor certification from Japan's National Research Institute of Brewing. No other non-Japanese in the world has both of these certifications.

He is the founder of the not-for-profit Sake Education Council and has educated over one thousand sake professionals worldwide through his Sake Professional Course.

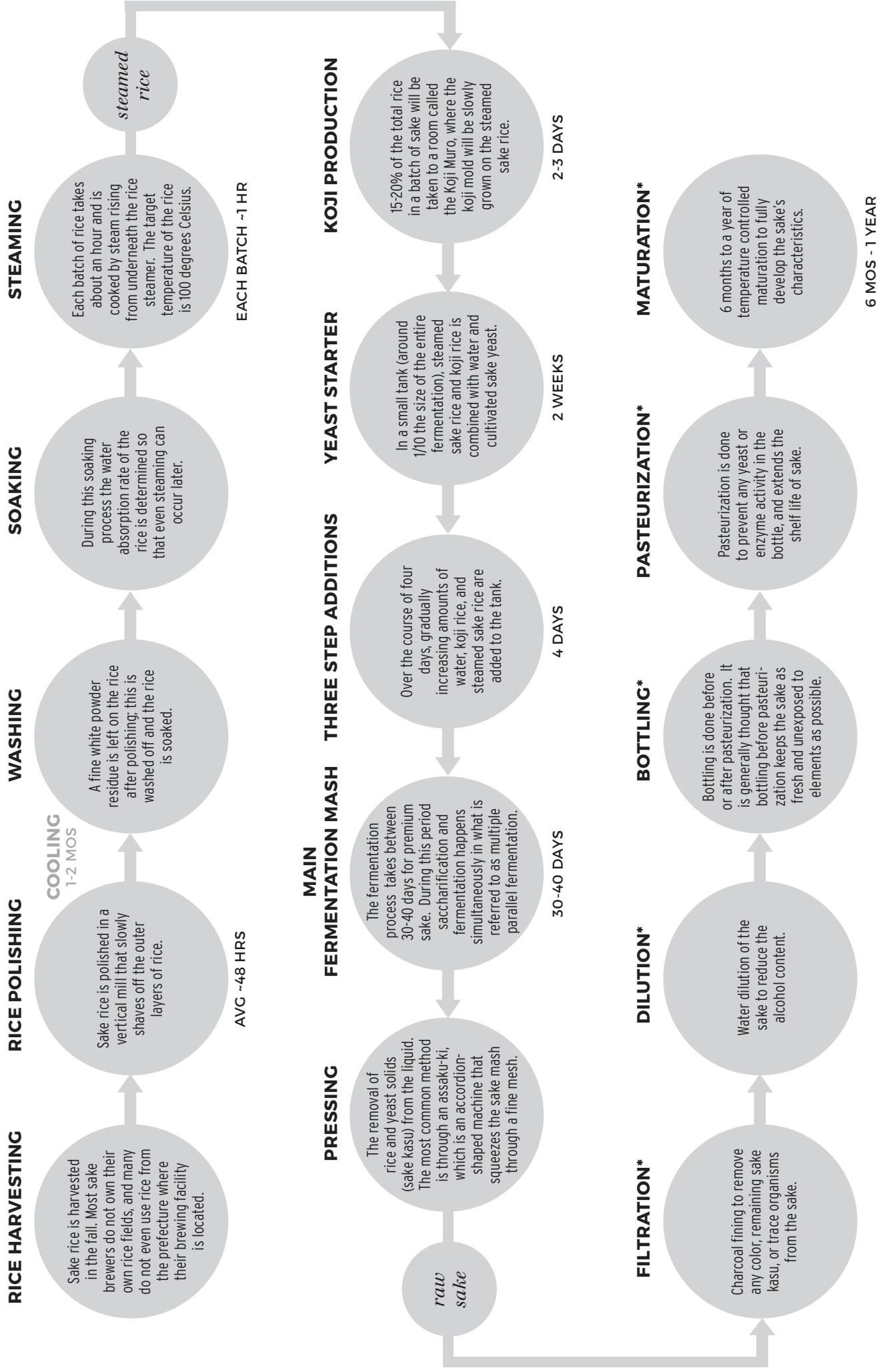


VINE CONNECTIONS

STEPS OF SAKE PRODUCTION



STEPS OF SAKE PRODUCTION



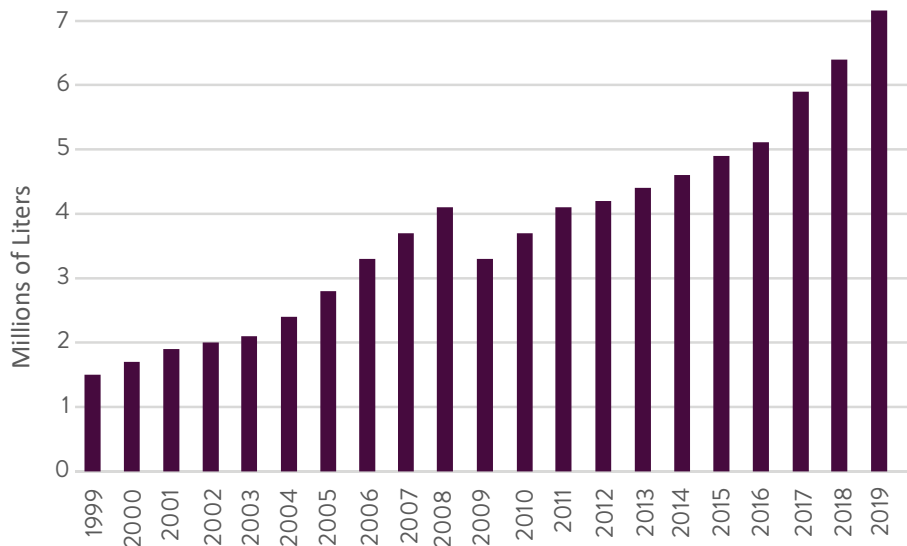
SAKE CONTINUES TO THRIVE

7.2 millions of liters of sake imported to the US in 2019.

61% increase in sake import volume over the last 5 years.

VOLUME OF SAKE IMPORTS - JAPAN TO US

Source: USDA

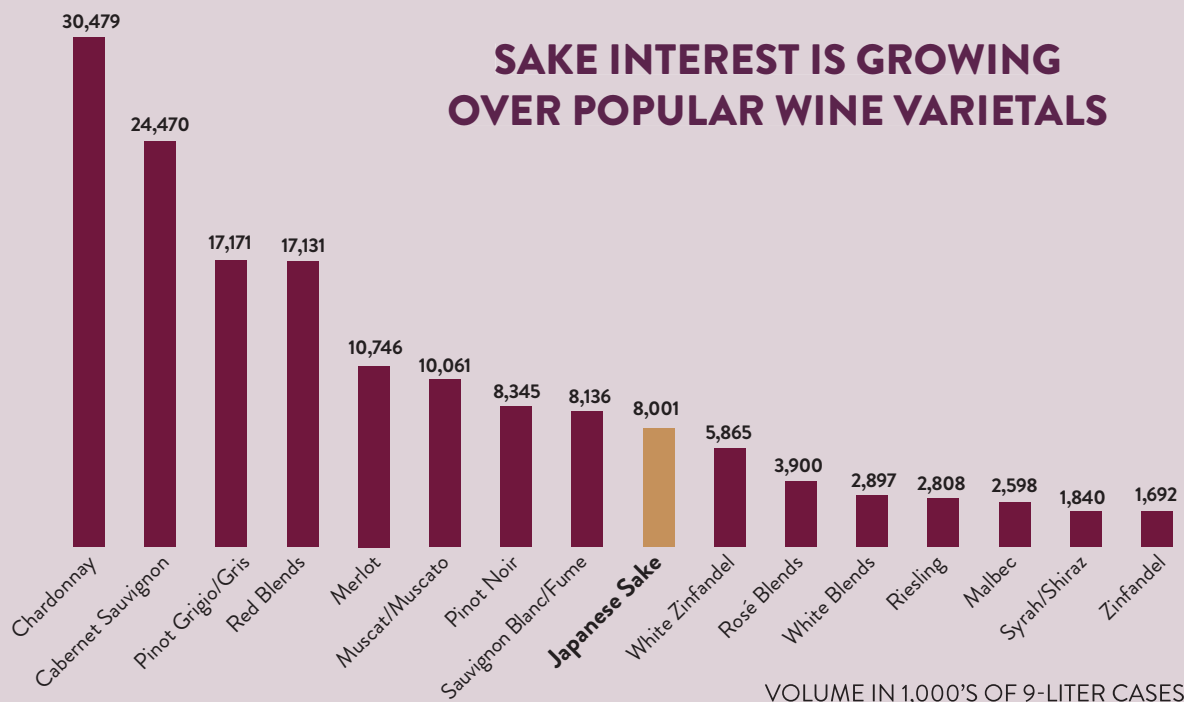


Sake imports have **INCREASED** every year for the past 20 years except during the 2009 recession.

8% of all sake imports to the US come from Vine Connections.

*Nielsen Data

SAKE INTEREST IS GROWING OVER POPULAR WINE VARIETALS



VOLUME IN 1,000'S OF 9-LITER CASES



VINE CONNECTIONS

SAKE SERVING SUGGESTIONS

POURING ETIQUETTE

Japanese culture places importance on respecting each other during all customs, including sake consumption.

- Pour sake with both hands by holding the neck of the bottle or carafe as much as possible.
- Pour each other's cups when sharing sake.

DRINKING VESSELS

- Serve sake in a wine glass for the ultimate sensory experience.
- More traditional vessels include wooden box cups (masu), porcelain cups (ochoko), and carafes (tokkuri).



TOP 6 MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT SAKE

Myth #1 Sake should be drunk hot.

There is a great range of enjoyable temperatures to drink sake, but serving it steaming hot masks its subtlety and exacerbates the alcohol.

Myth #2 Sake is low in acid relative to wine.

Sake lacks the acids associated with wine (tartaric and malic), but it is higher in amino acids than wine is. This makes it a perfect pairing for food.

Myth #3 Sake is high in alcohol.

Sake yeast is only capable of fermenting a beverage until it reaches 20% alcohol, and the sake is usually diluted afterward to bring down the level of alcohol to 14 to 18%.

Myth #4 Sake should be cheap.

Large format bottles of table sake are inexpensive, but the same is not true for premium sake. The high quality raw materials and the careful precision that goes along with crafting the beverage is very expensive.

Myth #5 Sake causes hangovers.

Excessive drinking of any alcohol will eventually cause a hangover. However, premium sake has no sulfites, additives, or preservatives, which is what many people believe to cause hangovers.

Myth #6 Sake oxidizes in the same amount of time as wine does.

Once opened, premium sake will remain fresh for at least one week. Some sakes stay fresh for even longer!



HOW TO SPEAK SAKE (Sah-kay) 酒

Genshu 原酒 (G'en-shoe): Undiluted sake that is often higher in alcohol and more concentrated in flavor and texture.

Ginjo 吟醸 (Geen-joe): Premium sake. Indicates a special and painstaking brewing process that produces a sake that is layered and complex, light and fragrant. Must have a seimaibuai (milling rate) of at least 60%.

Jizake 地酒 (jee-zah-kay): Local sake made by small brewers from a particular region, similar to the beer term "micro-brew."

Kanpai 乾杯 (kahn-pie): Cheers!

Kimoto 生もと (key-mo-toh): Traditional type of yeast starter with no lactic acid added. The yeast is activated by mashing the rice and koji into a paste with long poles. It takes around a month, resulting in savory, often gamey flavors.

Koku 石 (koe-koo): Originally, a measurement of rice defined as enough to feed one person for a year. For sake, a measurement of 180 liters used for describing a brewery's production capacity.

Koji 麹 (koh-jee): Mold that prompts the sake fermentation process.

Koshu 古酒 (koh-shoo): Sake deliberately aged in either bottle or tank. It must be kept at low temperatures in order retain a clear color and have a subtle roundedness and richness in texture.

Kura 蔵 (koo-rah): Sake brewery

Moto 酒母 (mo-toh): Yeast starter, also known as "shubo." An extremely high concentration of yeast cells is cultivated in a mixture of rice, koji, yeast, and water.

Nomikai 飲み会 (noh-mee-kai): A get-together or event focused around drinking.

Sakenomi 酒飲み (sah-kay-noh-mee): Someone who likes to drink.

Seimaibuai 精米歩合 (say-my-boo-eye): The degree to which rice has been polished (milled) before brewing. A value of 60% means that the rice has been milled so only 60% of the rice kernel remains (40% of the kernel has been ground away).

Shinaku 心白 (sheen-pah-koo): The hard, white center of sake rice comprised of starch.

-Shu 酒 (shoo): Another reading of the Japanese character meaning sake (which, in Japan, refers to any alcoholic beverage). This suffix is officially part of all sake types (e.g. junmai-shu, ginjo-shu) but is often dropped in abbreviation.

Toji 杜氏 (toe-gee): Head brewer of a brewery.

Tokubetsu 特別 (toe-koo-bet-sue): Special. Any sake labeled "tokubetsu" has been brewed in some special way. This may mean a high milling rate, a very low temperature fermentation, or a very special rice strain.

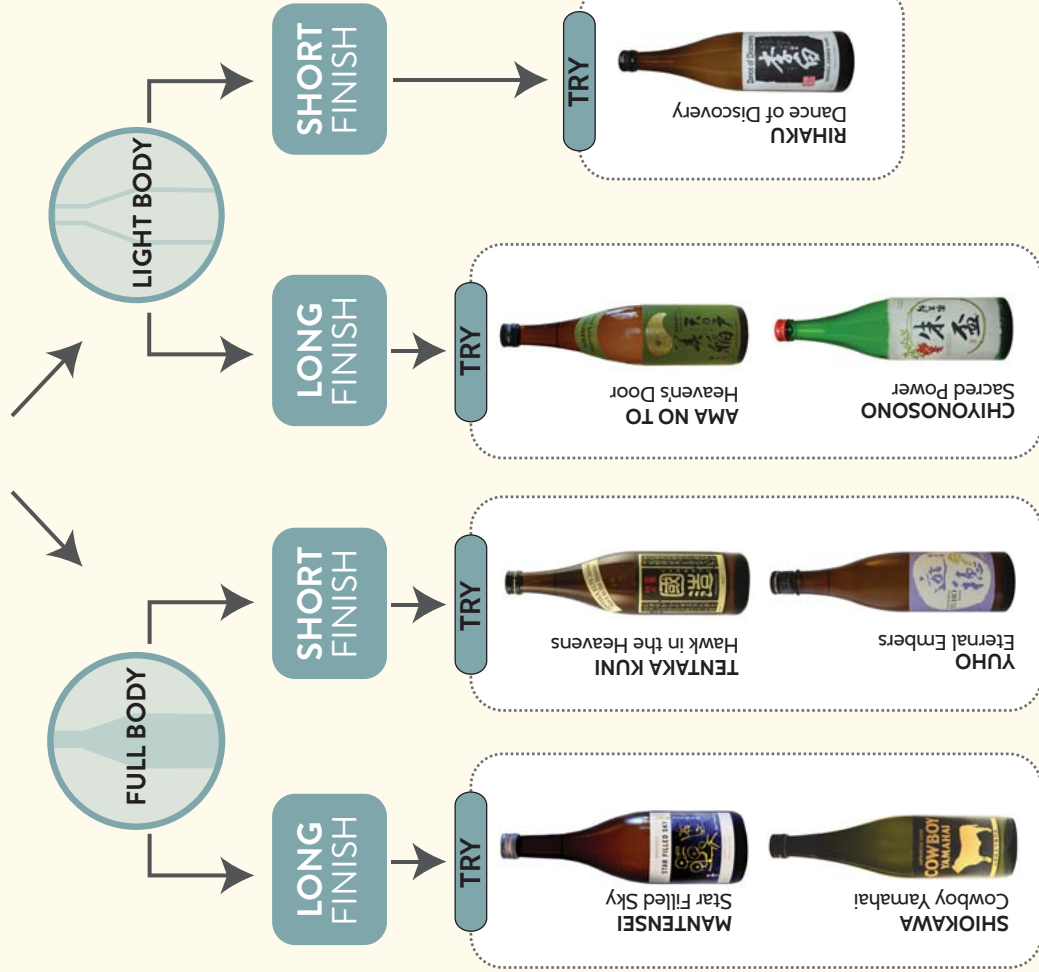
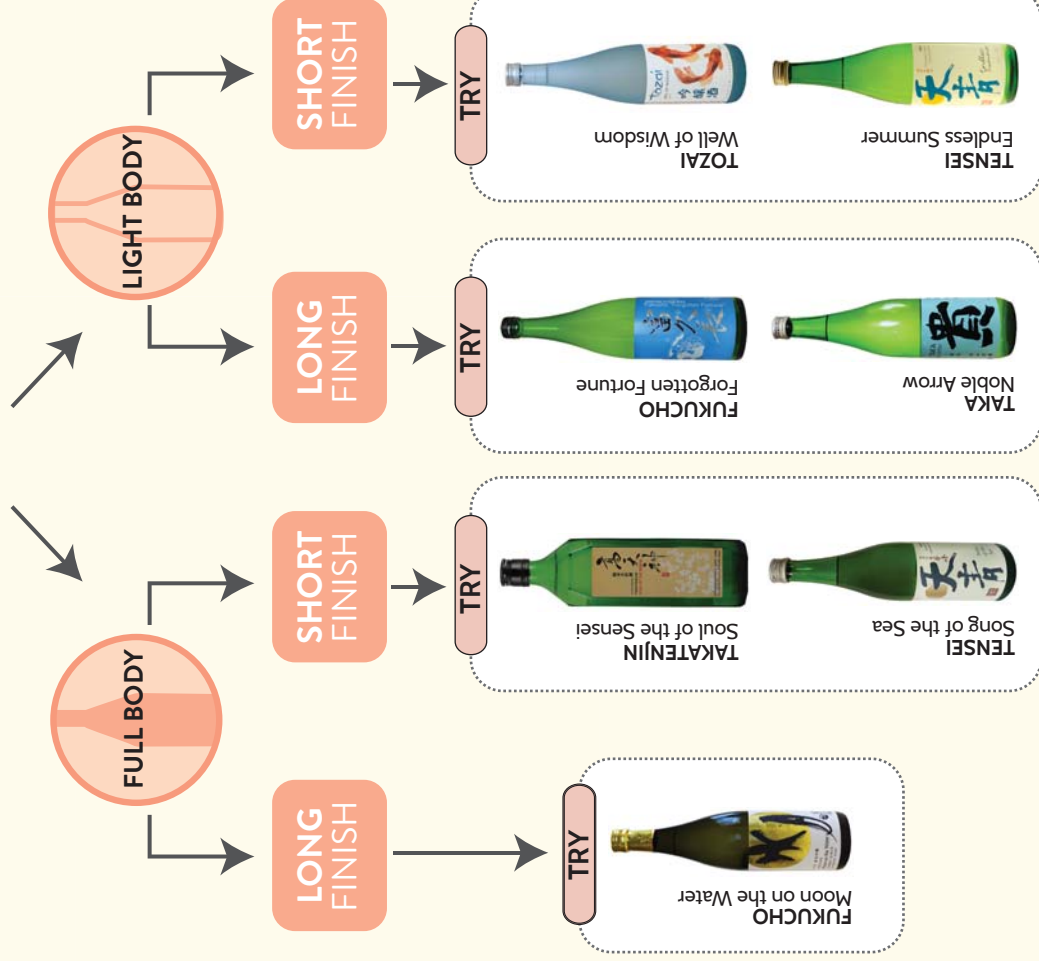
Yamahai 山廃 (yah-mah-hai): Yeast starter with no lactic acid added; yet instead of mashing the rice and koji together (kimoto), the koji enzymes work to dissolve all rice so that sake yeast can activate. Similar flavor profile to Kimoto.

Yopparai 酔っ払い (yoh-pahr-eye): To be drunk.



follow your taste buds to

Find your perfect sake match



VINE CONNECTIONS

www.vineconnections.com

AMA NO TO



The epitome of the “local” farm-to-table movement, Ama No To only uses rice, water, and labor from its own prefecture

WHY DOES AMA NO TO STAND OUT?

- This is a true “Grower’s Sake” - the rice growers also make the sake, creating an intimate synergy with the raw materials. They only use rice from fields close enough to see from the brewery.
- Ama No To translates to “Heaven’s Door,” referring to the prefecture which is at the northernmost tip of Japan. The label image is an icon of good fortune from Amaterasu, the Shinto Sun Goddess who is believed to have brought light to the world and cultivated Japan’s first rice fields.
- Toji Moriya-san is a critically acclaimed chef who brews his sake specifically to improve a meal.

BREWERY LOCATION: Akita Prefecture

— SAKE —

HEAVEN’S DOOR (Tokubetsu Junmai): This incredibly well-balanced and complex sake takes its time to express itself in the glass. Layers of dried flowers and baking spice give way to savory salinity that make this sake the perfect pairing for pickled and fermented foods.

**Heaven’s Door Namazake also available seasonally.*



BUSHIDO



Premium, handcrafted Ginjo Genshu Japanese sake fit for the warrior in you.


WHY DOES BUSHIDO TO STAND OUT?

- “Bushido” is the name for the ancient Japanese samurai code of moral values, loyalty, honor and wisdom. The fox represents the messenger of Inari, the God of rice, from Japanese mythology.
- Brewed in Kyoto, Japan, a prefecture known as the birthplace of sake. The brewery specializes in sake that is approachable for sake pros and novices alike.
- 180ml resealable can perfect for fitting into the active lifestyle or your pocket.
- The 1st Japanese sake available on tap.

BREWERY LOCATION: Kyoto Prefecture

— SAKE —

BUSHIDO WAY OF THE WARRIOR (Ginjo Genshu): This undiluted sake is 18% alcohol and can stand up to a variety of foods or be used in cocktails. Tropical notes of tart raspberry, Asian pear, and watermelon rind with a hint of white flowers and a spicy finish. Excellent paired with shrimp, BBQ or on its own.

 BUSHIDOSAKE



THE PERFECT FIT AT:

Asian-Centric Restaurants with Great Service

- Trendy Ramen
- Sushi
- Asian Fusion, Pho, Chinese, Izakayas, etc
- Sought after reservations for curated experiences

Lifestyle Bars

- Sought after happy hour accounts
- Music venues that value good alcohol and good experiences
- Hipster bars with craft beers on tap & non-well focused drinks
- Curated cocktail bars that adventure in mixology

VC MAKES IT EASY TO USE SAKE ON TAP



BEST PRACTICES

GAS 75% Nitrogen / 25% CO2 (AKA Beverage Gas or “Guinness Gas”)

GAS PRESSURE Pressure gauge reading should be between 4 - 10 PSI

STORAGE Store untapped kegs with other wines. Sake stays fresh - tapped 3 months, untapped 12 months.

LINE CLEANING FREQUENCY Every 3 months, or at changes of product.

EQUIPMENT & HARDWARE

[Only use wine-certified 304-grade Stainless Steel
No 303-grade Steel or beer parts]



FAUCET

For the best tasting sake on tap, we recommend a 304-grade stainless steel flow control faucet.



SHANK

Use 304-grade stainless steel for any parts that come in contact with the sake.



BEVERAGE GRADE LINES

Use only wine-grade, non-oxidizing “flavorlock” tubing.



COUPLER

Free Flow standard stainless steel kegs require a 304-grade coupler to attach the keg to the line.

ADDITIONAL EQUIPMENT



TAP TOWER

An additional tap tower may be required when installing a new direct draw system.



GAS & REGULATOR

Use Beverage CO2 gas only. In some instances, an inline gas regulator may be recommended.

For Additional Questions + Troubleshooting Contact Free Flow Wines
885-KEG-WINE or visit TRYWINEONTAP.com

CHIYONOSONO



Known as the Junmai expert, Chiyonosono was the first brewery to stop adding distilled alcohol to its sake after the rice shortages of World War II, paving the way for the popular Junmai category.

WHY DOES CHIYONOSONO STAND OUT?

- Originally a rice wholesaler, Chiyonosono specializes in rice cultivation and has access to heirloom strains leading to sake with distinctive rice textures and aromas.
- The brewery is located on the southernmost island of Kyushu - the gateway into Japan - known for Asian and European cuisine, historic architecture, and distinct regional culture.
- Chiyonosono also crafts shochu, Japan's other native alcohol beverage made from distilling raw materials like rice, barley, or potatoes. It can be served neat, or on the rocks, or with mixers

BREWERY LOCATION: Kumamoto Prefecture

SAKE

Shared Promise (Junmai): A commitment from the brewery to make premium sake despite agricultural hardships like those of WWII. Soft, expansive texture with aromas of orange blossom.

Sacred Power (Junmai Ginjo): A sake made with the heirloom rice Kumamoto Shinriki which was out of use for 50-100 years. The revitalized rice creates a bold sake loaded with briny ocean flavor and umami.

8,000 Generations (Shochu): A crisp rice shochu with hints of honeydew and a medium body. Its rice origins make it a true sake-lovers shochu, and it is a great cocktail mixer.



FUKUCHO



Fukucho's female brewery owner, Miho Imada, is also the Toji - a rarity in Japan to have both jobs done by the same person.

WHY DOES FUKUCHO STAND OUT?

- Hiroshima is the birthplace of Ginjo sake and is known for remarkably soft water that requires expert skill to use in sake production. Once mastered, the soft water enables a highly controlled, precise fermentation, resulting in vibrant fruit aromas.
- Miho-san's passion and curiosity for sake brewing is truly amazing: to date she has revived a local heirloom rice that was out of use for hundreds of years, created her own hybrid yeast starter, and experimented with brewing sake using white koji.
- There are around 30 female tojis in Japan, but when Miho-san started brewing there were far fewer. Her extreme dedication to her craft encourages the future of women in this industry.

BREWERY LOCATION: Hiroshima Prefecture

SAKE

FORGOTTEN FORTUNE (Junmai): Miho-san revived Hattanso rice, an extinct heirloom breed, by devoting over 10 years of her life to learning how to grow it and brew with it. She mills the rice less than most Junmai sake because she believes it results in the best expression of its flavor, balance, and complexity. Hiroshima has more oyster beds than anywhere else in Japan, influencing the amazing pairing offered with oysters.

MOON ON THE WATER (Junmai Ginjo): This vibrant showstopper aromatically jumps out of the glass and will make you fall in love with sake. It is a natural match for sweet, succulent shellfish like lobster and scallops, but surprising pairings like bittersweet chocolate work, too. **Namazake also available seasonally.*

SEASIDE SPARKLING (Junmai): Sparkling sake made through secondary fermentation in bottle. Crisp notes of lemon-lime and apple aromas with a soft, frothy finish that pairs well with seafood.



GINGA SHIZUKU



Premium drip-pressed sake that celebrates nature's local gift of Dewasansan rice & water from Yamagata prefecture.

WHY DOES GINGA SHIZUKU STAND OUT?

- The brewery is located in Yonezawa in Southern Yamagata, an area known as the “land of samurais” and was recently awarded a Geographical Indication (GI), one of only 3 that exist in Japan.
- Surrounded by mountains with a stretch open to the sea, Yamagata absorbs extreme cold and snow, perfect for shizuku pressing.
- Owned by the Kojima family, the brewery was founded in 1597 and has been passed down to each generation since the start of the company - now on it's 24th generation.

BREWERY LOCATION: Yamagata Prefecture

—SAKE—

DIVINE DROPLETS (Junmai Daiginjo): A Shizuku Junmai Daiginjo that celebrates nature's local gift of Dewasansan rice & water. A refreshing & pure sake with notes of pineapple, white peach, green apple, lily and hints of white pepper.



KANBARA



Powerful, big, bold sake from Japan's most popular brewing region, Niigata, which is otherwise known for producing light, clean sake.

WHY DOES KANBARA STAND OUT?

- Kanbara's bold style comes from brewing sake that is muroka (not charcoal filtered).
- The husband and wife co-owners come from families with sake backgrounds and Toji Kenichiro-san has made sake for over 50 years, giving Kanbara a long history of talent and experience.
- The sake is named after the region's "Fox Bride" festival that celebrates agriculture and rice growing. The annual celebration features fox costumes and a bridal procession.

BREWERY LOCATION: Tsugawamachi, Niigata Prefecture

SAKE

BRIDE OF THE FOX (Junmai Ginjo): With a 50% polishing rate, this sake could technically qualify as a Junmai Daiginjo, but the remarkable savory notes give it a much broader food pairing versatility that identifies more with the style expected from Junmai Ginjo. It is made with classic Ginjo style yeast, resulting in unique, earthy persimmon notes and maritime umami. One of the best meat pairings in the portfolio.

ANCIENT TREASURE (Yamahai Junmai Genshu Koshu): The intense complexity of this sake is achieved through an abundance of koji, yamahai, no dilution, and over ten years of careful aging. The umami is extremely pronounced on the nose with tasting notes of olive oil, sea salt and toasted sesame.



KAWATSURU



Known for its rice-driven style with elegant, rich texture, Kawatsuru pays respect to the crane that symbolizes longevity and good fortune.

WHY DOES KAWATSURU STAND OUT?

- Located on the beautiful island of Shikoku, the brewery translates to “river crane,” named after lucky local sightings of the culturally symbolic bird.
- 6th generation president Yuichiro Kawahito also functions as the toji of Kawatsuru, working tirelessly on both the production of his sakes and managing the farming of his rice.
- Using almost all locally grown rice, Kawatsuru brews sakes that are soulful, round, and structured without being high-tone or showy.

BREWERY LOCATION: Kagawa Prefecture

—SAKE—

CRANE OF PARADISE (Junmai): Textured and mineral-driven with defined notes of grapefruit and a grassy, bright and lifted finish. Pretty aromas and a delicate earthiness resulting in a rich, deeply satisfying style. Described as “umakuchi,” a combination between sweet, dry, and umami flavors.



KONTEKI



Konteki's culture centers around 15th century ideals of Zen Buddhism and “wabi-sabi,” the belief that beauty within the arts should be understated and pure – just like sake.

WHY DOES KONTEKI STAND OUT?

- Kyoto is the birthplace of sake and is home to the local Fushimi Mizu, one of Japan's most prized water sources of soft, pure water.
- Well-respected rice farmer Masayasu Tanaka grows rice for the brewery. He is famous for growing some of Japan's best quality Yamada Nishiki rice, considered the pinnacle of premium sake rice.
- Konteki presents a unique opportunity to demonstrate the differences in the tasting profiles of a Junmai Daiginjo and a Daiginjo. The two sake are made in the same way (same rice, yeast, milling rate, length of fermentation), but Tears of Dawn has a small amount of distilled alcohol added after fermentation to open up aromatics and lighten up the overall impact.

BREWERY LOCATION: Kyoto Prefecture

— SAKE —

PEARLS OF SIMPLICITY (Junmai Daiginjo): More subtle and nuanced than most highly aromatic Junmai Daiginjos. Aromas of white flower and Asian pear with rich minerality and rice texture.

TEARS OF DAWN (Daiginjo): Lush notes of tropical banana, anise seed, and truffle. These same flavors come rushing through the full-bodied palate followed by a velvety and dangerously smooth finish.



MANA 1751



Established in 1751, became legendary in 1998 when the current toji took over and literally won every gold medal in sight.

WHY DOES MANA 1751 STAND OUT?

- This sake embraces a truly purist philosophy; undiluted, unfiltered, unblended, pure rice sake made in the risky and labor intensive ancient yamahai method.
- Toji Izumi-san is on a quest to push the envelope of sake's flavor, structure, and appeal as we know it today. He has been quoted as saying "It is more important to be the only one than to be number one".
- This is a true microbrewery; three total employees making only 200 koku annually (4,000 x 9L cases)

BREWERY LOCATION: Fukui Prefecture

—SAKE—

TRUE VISION (Yamahai Tokubetsu Junmai Muroka Genshu): This sake is a true expression of Fukui, using local yeast, bottled from a single tank, and highlights the pristine, nationally famous water source. An aromatic and expressive yamahai with notes of tart yogurt, mushroom, honey, banana and steamed rice.



MANTENSEI



Mantensei creates elegant expressions of umami through sake that can be enjoyed at a wide variety of temperatures.

WHY DOES MANTENSEI STAND OUT?

- Mantensei polishes their rice to 50% even though the sake is not a Daiginjo in order to create extreme drinkability alongside rich umami and savory notes—a rare balance.
- President Touda-san makes sake that can be enjoyed at a wide range of temperatures and has been recognized at numerous warmed sake competitions.
- Mantensei uses a higher-than-usual ratio of koji rice to bring out distinctive notes of smoke, honey, and soy.

BREWERY LOCATION: Tottori Prefecture

—SAKE—

STAR FILLED SKY (Junmai Ginjo): Aged in tank for 3 years, this umami-rich sake finishes dry and clean from precise fermentation and water minerality. This unusual juxtaposition makes it stand out as a savory sake that can carry you through an entire meal and will not weigh you down.



RIHAKU



Rihaku is named after the famous Chinese poet from the 8th century, Li Po, who was known to drink a big bottle of sake and write a hundred poems.

WHY DOES RIHAKU STAND OUT?

- Rihaku boasts one of the highest average milling rates of all Japanese sake breweries—a testament to its dedication to high quality.
- Each Rihaku sake in the portfolio is made with a different type of sake rice, demonstrating how the deliberate style of a producer can be expressed by four rice types.
- The ancient Prime Minister of the Shimane Prefecture named this brewery Rihaku because of the way that these sake inspire poetry. The calligraphy on the label is his original handwriting.

BREWERY LOCATION: Shimane Prefecture

SAKE

DANCE OF DISCOVERY (Junmai): Brewed with a newly developed rice called Kan no Mai that withstands cold climates and is full of personality, and it takes a fair amount of expertise to work with. The specific milling rate of 68% employed in this sake results in a smoky, saline rice flavor that is perfect with yakitori.

WANDERING POET (Junmai Ginjo): This Junmai Ginjo made with Yamada Nishiki rice has the ability to complement even the most wine-unfriendly vegetables like asparagus, artichoke hearts, and broccoli rabe.

DREAMY CLOUDS (Tokubetsu Junmai Nigori): Rihaku was the first brewery to make a dry, lightly cloudy style of Nigori sake. Dreamy Clouds, brewed with Gohyakumangoku rice, presents an opportunity to move Nigori drinkers forward to new styles of sake.



RIHEI



Meticulously handcrafted, single-distilled Honkaku Shochu made from local ginger. A refreshing shochu on its own and excellent in cocktails.

WHY DOES RIHEI STAND OUT?

- Ochiai Distillery [Rihei] is a 4th generation, family-run distillery that honors the traditions of their 100-year old past while continuing to evolve as an award-winning shochu producer in the 21st century.
- While most shochu is made from sweet potatoes, barley or rice, they focus on crafting high quality, small production shochu made from locally grown produce like ginger, pumpkin, bell peppers, and yomogi leaves.
- With 38% alcohol genshu this Japanese craft spirit contains 20% ginger, 30% rice, and 50% barley.

DISTILLERY LOCATION: Miyazaki Prefecture

SHOCHU

RIHEI GINGER (Shochu): Refreshing ginger notes on the palate with a tinge of spice and citrus that comes from the koji rice and barley. Any craft spirit enthusiast will enjoy sipping on Rihei Ginger, and it is also excellent in a wide range of classic and modern cocktails.



SHIOKAWA



Traditional but not bound by tradition, Shiokawa-san's curiosity and scientific approach to brewing results in constant experimentation to make better sake year after year.

WHY DOES SHIOKAWA STAND OUT?

- This is a true family business, with his only three employees being his wife, his cousin and himself.
- Although Shiokawa-san first attempted making yamahai 14 years ago as an experiment, the demand for his yamahais have increased to the point where yamahai is now the majority of his total sake production.
- Cowboys symbolize grit, prosperity, and independence and is an icon romanticized in Japanese culture as it is all the things they people strive for.

BREWERY LOCATION: Uchinomachi, Niigata Prefecture

—SAKE—

COWBOY YAMAHAI (Yamahai Junmai Ginjo Genshu): This undiluted brew is fit for a cowboy – made in the ancient Yamahai style, loaded with umami, and pairs beautifully with meat. Aromas of cocoa and smoke with a rich and smooth finish.



TAKAHIRO



Takahiro's estate rice growing philosophy cultivates regionally focused sake full of tension and balance.

WHY DOES TAKAHIRO STAND OUT?

- President/Toji Takahiro Nagayama is passionate about his estate grower-producer style sake, allowing him to brew sake that represents his personality and to reach all the people who drink it.
- “Taka” is the first character of Takahiro-san’s name and means “noble.” His unwavering discipline and commitment to technical precision result in elegant but restrained sake.
- After learning about wine, Takahiro-san transformed an average mid-sized brewery to one that focuses on small production, premium quality, and junmai-only brewing. His “think global, act local” ideology and brewing style of energetic tension have gained a cult following in Japan.

BREWERY LOCATION: Yamaguchi Prefecture

—SAKE—

NOBLE ARROW (Tokubetsu Junmai): Well-defined but restrained aromas with flavors of melon rind, lime leaf and mint. This sake is mineral-driven with structured acidity and roundness – a timeless style that is not over the top like many other cult sakes.



TAKATENJIN



In a region of endless sunshine and pristine water sources, brewery Doi Shuzo stands out as an iconic producer of the fruity, dry style of sake that the area is known for.

WHY DOES TAKATENJIN STAND OUT?

- Takatenjin is brewed at Doi Shuzo, which is recognized for its environmentally-friendly use of solar power, on-site water treatment, and other renewable energy sources.
- Pure water put Shizuoka on the map for its tea production and its concentration of wasabi fields—two delicate products that require flawless water like sake does.
- The most common yeast from Shizuoka, Hase-Doi, originated at this brewery and is named after the brewery's legendary Toji, Hase-San, and the Doi family that owns it.

BREWERY LOCATION: Shizuoka Prefecture

SAKE

SWORD OF THE SUN (Tokubetsu Honjozo): Bright and refreshing, this sake is the perfect choice for daytime drinking and is the brewery employees' drink of choice. The juniper botanicals and cucumber notes make it the perfect gin lover's sake.

SOUL OF THE SENSEI (Junmai Daiginjo): This sake commemorates the life of the previous Toji who was a Brew Master Sensei and one of the "Four Guardians of Heaven" from the prestigious Noto Toji Guild. A rare combination of concentrated fruit aromatics and dry mouthfeel in a Junmai Daiginjo.



TENSEI



Tensei is a multitalented brewery defined by an entrepreneurial spirit, an international outlook, and a laid-back surfer atmosphere.

WHY DOES TENSEI STAND OUT?

- The cultured and forward-thinking brewery has a hand in other enterprises as well, including a beer brewery, a Japanese restaurant, an Italian restaurant, a bakery, and an art gallery all on site.
- Tensei is inspired by Kanagawa's beautiful coastline and surfer culture. The town is also the birth place of the famous Japanese woodblock art, The Great Wave.
- This small production brewery makes less than 8,000 cases per year, and because of its hip reputation and popularity in Japan, most of it is not exported.

BREWERY LOCATION: Kanagawa Prefecture

SAKE

SONG OF THE SEA (Junmai Ginjo): A rare opportunity to try sake made with Yeast #9 sourced from the brewery itself, rather than from the National Research Institute of Brewing. The result is a saltwater taffy salinity that evokes memories of the beach.

ENDLESS SUMMER (Tokubetsu Honjozo): Enjoy the feel of a perfect endless summer with this bright, refreshing taste of Kanagawa's surfer culture. Bright and fresh sake with a salted melon finish.



TENTAKA



Located in a region known for its pure rivers and natural beauty, Tentaka has created a sustainable microcosm to preserve and support future generations of sake.

WHY DOES TENTAKA STAND OUT?

- President Ozaki-san's passion for the environment has led the brewery to use local ingredients, to reuse production byproducts, and to get Organic Certification in Japan, the US, and the European Union—one of only two breweries with triple certification.
- Brewed in a landlocked region, Tentaka sake is locally treasured with only a small amount of sake leaving the prefecture. It celebrates the local flavors of rustic, savory, and meaty foods by brewing rich sake with high acidity.
- Tentaka translates to “hawk in the heavens,” a prosperous Japanese symbol that is thought to bring good fortune to the brewery.

BREWERY LOCATION: Tochigi Prefecture

SAKE

HAWK IN THE HEAVENS (Junmai): A go-to sake for barbeque, this rustic high acid sake is a great representation of traditional Junmai style that you would find in Izakayas throughout Japan.

ORGANAKA (Organic Junmai): This is also a yamahai sake, though not published on the bottle; the intention being to create a completely natural product with nothing added. Careful tasting will reveal hints of smoke and crisp acidity from the yamahai process.

SILENT STREAM (Junmai Daiginjo): Out of the 24 grades of Yamada Nishiki rice, this sake is made from the very highest (Toku A Tokujo-Mai), polished down to an exceedingly labor-intensive and costly 35%. It is made in the non-pressed free run shizuku style resulting in the ultimate luxury.



TOKO



One of the oldest active breweries in Japan, Toko is an exclusive purveyor of sake to the famous Uesugi samurai clan in Yamagata prefecture.

WHY DOES TOKO STAND OUT?

- Toko is located in Yonezawa in Southern Yamagata, an area known as the “land of samurais”. Toko’s owners, the Kojima family, are closely associated with the Uesugi and are thought of as samurai royalty.
- Yamagata was recently awarded a Geographical Indication (GI), one of only 3 that exist in Japan.
- The brewery was founded in 1597 and has been passed down to each generation since the start of the company - now on it’s 24th generation.

BREWERY LOCATION: Yamagata Prefecture

SAKE

ULTRALUXE (Junmai Daiginjo): The ultimate indulgence; made with the highest quality Yamada Nishiki rice and bottled using only the drops of liquid released via gravity at the end of fermentation, with no force or pressure applied.

SUN RISE (Junmai Ginjo): Made from Dewasansan rice grown exclusively in Yamada prefecture. Grassy, floral aromas with green apple and melon.



TOZAI



Tozai is the authentically Japanese sake that bridges the gap between East and West and is an invitation for all to enjoy Japanese sake.

WHY DOES TOZAI STAND OUT?

- Tozai's style is approachable for sake pros and novices alike, taking sake out of the "special occasion" category and making it an everyday drink.
- Each Tozai sake is a classic representation of its style and grade.
- Be transported to Japan just by looking at Tozai - the labels feature hand-painted koi fish, traditional Japanese kanji, and origami paper patterns.

BREWERY LOCATION: Kyoto Prefecture

SAKE

NIGHT SWIM (futsu): Approachable and vibrant sake in a can. Tropical stone fruit aromas with a medium body & clean finish.

LIVING JEWEL (Junmai): Named after Japan's colorful koi fish that represent good fortune and luck. Light and easy drinking with aromas of banana and white grape.

SNOW MAIDEN (Junmai Nigori): This cloudy sake has vibrant notes of honeydew melon, raw pumpkin, and radish. Creamy texture with a bright, surprisingly dry finish.

WELL OF WISDOM (Ginjo): This sake has juicy watermelon and citrus notes and a racy white pepper finish.

TYPHOON (Futsu): A table sake of remarkable quality with rustic banana bread and nut notes. Sturdy enough to handle being warmed or mixed in cocktails.

BLOSSOM OF PEACE (Plum Sake): Local, all-natural aodani plums are soaked in Tozai sake for over three months. The bracingly sour plums result in an incredibly balanced sake with tart, juicy acidity on the finish.



YAMADA SHOTEN



This husband & wife team continues to brew their handcrafted sake using the same deep-rooted traditions that were originally used by their ancestors.

WHY DOES YAMADA SHOTEN STAND OUT?

- Made in an ultra-handcrafted and traditional style, the kanji on the label translates to “nothing has changed since the beginning”. This is Vine Connections’ smallest brewery (280 koku).
- Yamada Shoten was founded in 1868 and the Yamada family continues to mill their own rice in-house like their ancestors did without access to technology (unheard of for such a small-production brewery). They brew at ambient temperatures without heating or cooling controls.
- The brewery is located in Gifu, a remote, mountainous area known for hiking, skiing, fishing and natural hot springs.

BREWERY LOCATION: Gifu

— SAKE —

EVERLASTING ROOTS (Tokubetsu Junmai): Savory and rustic style with smoky, nutty aromas. Flavors of melon, orange, and clove spices. This 900 ml bottle is perfect for sharing.



YUHO



Unapologetically unconventional, Yuho experiments with brewing components and techniques to produce sake that have a wild, gamey characteristic with pronounced acidity and remarkable texture.

WHY DOES YUHO STAND OUT?

- President Miho Fujita, a single career woman from Tokyo with no prior knowledge of sake, and Toji Yokomichi-san, who left his corporate job to pursue sake, do not follow traditional brewing methods - they brew the sake they enjoy drinking.
- Yuho means “happy rice” and also refers to the city’s supposed numerous UFO sightings.
- Miho-san believes that her sake can stay open for longer than most - she personally likes to drink them after being open for 1-2 months.

BREWERY LOCATION: Ishikawa Prefecture

SAKE

ETERNAL EMBERS (Junmai): Bread pudding aromatics of raisin, nut, and fig. Pairs with a wide variety of dishes from patê to pecan pie. Aged for 1 year in bottle to add rich texture and umami flavor.

RHYTHM OF THE CENTURIES (Kimoto Junmai): The ancient kimoto (pole ramming) method is used in the production of this sake along with an extensive 4 years of bottle aging at low temperatures. Aromas of hay, corn husk, and banana, with the dry, almost tannic qualities of chamomile tea and walnut skin on the finish.

