

# sake day special

(Publicity)

## ‘Sake Samurai’ spreads the ‘nihonshu’ word

Exports of sake have increased steadily for over 10 years and the sake boom combined with the growing popularity of Japanese food in the U.S. has showed no signs of slowing down.

In celebration of Nihonshu-no Hi (Sake Day) on Oct. 1, The Japan Times interviewed Timothy Sullivan, founder of UrbanSake.com, a Web site providing a broad range of English information on sake, and one of just 17 “Sake Samurai” in the world.

**Q: Please give us a brief profile of yourself. How did you get into sake and what is the charm of sake for you?**

In 2005, I sampled premium sake for the first time at a Japanese Restaurant in New York City and I couldn't believe what I was tasting. The complex, nuanced and delicious flavors simply amazed me. I was hooked, and immediately began researching how water and rice come together to make “nihonshu,” known in the U.S. simply as sake. I discovered sake through sake-food pairing. I love the wonderful taste of sake as well as the great flexibility the drink offers. You can drink sake in so many ways—it's wonderful.

I started UrbanSake.com first as a blog to help myself keep track of the sake I was tasting at the many sake events New York has to offer and as a repository for everything I was learning. What began as a labor of love grew over the next few years to become a larger online resource for sake information and education in the U.S.

In October 2007, I was invited to Kyoto by the Japan Sake Brewers Association Junior Council to be named a “Sake Samurai.” Receiving the title was a tremendous honor and a life-changing event for me. As part of the tenets of becoming a Sake Samurai, I vowed to “spread the word about Japanese sake around the world with pride and passion.” In that spirit, I have become a sake educator, writer and speaker, doing my best to share my passion, respect and enthusiasm for sake with the world.

**Q: Do you feel that sake is becoming more popular in the U.S.?**

Definitely. I teach sake classes in New York and I have seen a strong interest from students wishing to learn the basics. There has also been a surge of interest in Japanese food in the U.S. and I think sake goes hand in hand with that trend.

**Q: Why do you think people in the U.S. have begun to appreciate sake?**

I think sake is so popular simply because it tastes good. I think people are also surprised by the outstanding quality you can find. Many people do not know how good premium sake is and it's always a joy for me to help people discover a love for Japanese sake!

**Q: How do people in the U.S. enjoy sake?**

Most people still only enjoy sake when they are at Japanese restaurants. There are a brave few who try to pair sake with non-Asian flavors. I think this is the new frontier in sake pairing. I often buy sake to enjoy at home. There are more and more people who are discovering this way to enjoy sake, too.

**Q: Oct. 1 is “Nihonshu-no Hi,” Sake Day in Japan. How is it celebrated in the U.S.?**

In major U.S. cities, “Nihonshu-no Hi” is celebrated with many different kinds of sake events. There are sake-pairing dinners, lectures by sake brewers, sake tastings and lots of fun. It's a great day

to discover sake.

**Q: Are there any new or interesting sake movements, events or trends?**

I have noticed a trend regarding “nama” sake. This type of unpasteurized or “draft” sake is becoming quite popular in the U.S. It is difficult to transport because of its perishable nature, but I think more and more Americans are coming to discover, and love nama sake.

**Q: How do you see the future for sake in Japan and the U.S.?**

I am optimistic. The quality of available sake has never been higher. The great availability of superior sake is a wonderful sign of the growing interest we have in sake. I think consumption of premium sake will continue to increase. It's an exciting time to be drinking sake!

**Q: What do you think is important for sake culture to prosper in Japan and the world?**

One word comes to mind: education! I think for sake culture to expand and grow around the world, we need to channel our efforts into sake education. I think that once people understand how sake is made, and all the care, attention and detail that goes into making sake, they will appreciate it all the more. Yes, for me, education is key!

**Q: What advice would you give to those who want to learn about sake? Where can beginners start?**

For people interested in sake, I always recommend going to any local sake-tasting events you may have in your area. It's a great opportunity to taste some wonderful sake and meet like-minded folks who are into sake, too. If you have the chance to meet sake brewers at a sake dinner or tasting event—don't miss it! I have learned so much from talking directly with the nice people who work right where the sake is made.

**Q: How would you recommend enjoying sake and what food does it best complement?**

I enjoy sake with many types of food. I would always recommend a lighter and cleaner-style sake with lighter foods such as sushi and sashimi. If you find a more robust “yamahai” sake to your liking, I have found this type pairs well with turkey, which is a food I love. I often drink a luxurious “junmai daiginjo” before dinner and savor its elegant flavors on their own. This way, I can focus on the flavors and nuance of the sake itself.



**Trendsetter: Sushi Ran, a popular sushi restaurant in Sausalito, Calif., regularly offers about 60 varieties of sake. The restaurant is seeing growing sake sales, which started to exceed wine sales this year.** SUZIE BUCHHOLZ

## California restaurateur promotes ‘unique’ Japanese food, sake culture

Yoshimori Tome, better known as Yoshi Tome in the U.S., is CEO of Sushi Ran, a Japanese restaurant in Sausalito, Calif., and president of the Northern California Japanese Restaurant Association. Sushi Ran's unique blend of traditional Japanese and innovative California/Pacific cuisine has won it many accolades, including recommendations in the Michelin and Zagat restaurant guides.

In June, Tome received an award from Japan's minister of agriculture, forestry and fisheries for his accomplishments in the restaurant industry, and his role in helping to promote Japanese culture and cuisine to the world.

The Japan Times interviewed Tome via e-mail about how Japanese food and sake are accepted in the U.S., what he thinks is necessary to further promote sake in the States, and his efforts to do so. Excerpts of his remarks follow.

“According to the Zagat restaurant survey, Japanese restaurants are growing in popularity and Japanese cuisine is becoming one of the most popular in the U.S. There are so many Japanese restaurants opening, many run by non-Japanese chefs or owners. Sashimi and Japanese food ingredients, such as soy sauce, wasabi, ‘yuzu’ miso, etc., are becoming staples of Californian cuisine, as well as French and Italian. They have become English words. I think Japanese food is attracting people in the U.S. because it is very unique—sushi is especially unique for its serving style. Japanese food is also healthy and visually beautiful. “Sake is also a very unique product, which formerly was produced only in Japan. It is becoming recognized as a ‘health-

ier’ alcoholic beverage: Unlike wine, sake contains no tannins or sulfites, which can cause headaches and sinus problems. I take great pleasure in introducing the enjoyment of sake, one of the most purely made alcoholic beverages on the planet, to our restaurant's guests who come from the Bay Area of California and from all over the world.

“To celebrate this year's Sake Day at Sushi Ran, which is always celebrated Oct. 1, we will have an outdoor ‘kagamiwari,’ a festive, traditional sake barrel-breaking ceremony, and new ‘nama’ sake to taste. The sake brewer will be on hand to answer questions and give additional information to help our guests fully enjoy the experience.

“At Sushi Ran, we regularly offer about 60 different sake and daily feature as many as 50 sake by the glass, in addition to our 200-bottle wine list. Wine has historically accounted for more than 50 percent of beverage sales, however, this year sake sales are exceeding wine sales. We expect to see this trend continue. Our sake sales account for 50 percent of our total beverage sales, with wine at 43 percent, and beers and soft drinks at 7 percent.

“To help people in the U.S. become more familiar with sake and to develop the industry here, I think standardization and simplification of sake labeling is necessary. It is very difficult to understand by non-Japanese speakers. At Sushi Ran, to help make our extensive sake list less intimidating for people who are unfamiliar with its character, taste and style, our sake menu is divided into four different categories that most wine drinkers are familiar with: fragrant, light and smooth, rich and aged.

“To further develop the sake industry here, education is important. At Sushi Ran, several times a year we host sake-pairing and sake maker dinners, inviting brewers from Japan to share their new products and educate our guests. We have found this is the best way to help educate the American customer and to enrich the knowledge of our staff.

“We also need more information about sake in English. There are only a few books available. Sake is born from the rich, deep, Japanese food culture. It needs explanations with its history; we need to tell its story. It is very important to present sake alongside Japanese culture.”

## Born sake brewery shows true quality rises to the top

Michiru Yoshino  
CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Deeply rooted in Japanese culture, sake has been produced in Japan for more than 2,000 years and is now produced in every corner of the nation. There are about 2,000 breweries nationwide, from Hokkaido to Okinawa, and each local brewery has its own characteristics, history and philosophy. Among them, KatouKichibee Shouten is one of the most recognized breweries in the nation because of its award-winning sake.

Established in 1860, KatouKichibee Shouten produces some 50 kinds of exclusive-quality “junmai daiginjo” sake. “All our sake brands are nonfiltered. They are made only from premium rice, and matured for at least a year in temperatures of between zero and minus 10 degrees Celsius,” explains brewery head Atsuhide Kato.

This year's sake making started early Sept. 16, following the harvesting and polishing of Gohyakumangoku, the locally grown brand of rice used exclusively for Born: Tokujo sake. “The cold summer had us worried in the beginning. But the hot days that followed brought a better harvest than usual, making each rice grain heavy and firm. This year's rice was perfect for producing our sake,” says Kato.

The name of KatouKichibee Shouten's Born sake is derived from the Sanskrit word for “genuine purity” or “eternal truth.” The brewery added the English word “born” to give its sake the additional meaning of “birth and creativity toward the future.”

Born has won many best sake prizes in Japan and worldwide, the latest being the gold award for several Born brands at the 2009 U.S. National Sake Appraisal. The secret of such unwavering high acclaim lies in the “enthusiasm of our brewers to make the finest sake from good rice, coupled with the splendid water of Sabae,” says Kato.

Sabae, the hometown of Born, is located north of Kyoto, facing the Japan Sea in Fukui Prefecture. During the 13th century, it developed as a temple town. By around the 18th century, it had become a castle town with a flourishing handicrafts industry.

“Our city has been a long-time base for high-grade manufacturing such as ‘shikki’ lacquerware. Around 75 percent of all shikki is produced in our locality. ‘Echizen washi’ Japanese paper, once used for bank notes by the Bank of Japan, is another local product that we are proud of,” explains Kato. “Because the area also produces a variety of knives, it is



Atsuhide Kato

often referred to as ‘the knife village.’ And as for eyeglasses, roughly 97 percent of those sold in Japan today are produced in Sabae. Such a spirit and tradition of making outstanding goods runs deep in our blood. That DNA is present in our sake making.”

Born is registered in more than 90 countries and six Born brands (over 10 products) are available in the U.S.: namely, Born: Yume wa Masayume (Dreams Come True), Born: Nihon no Tsubasa (Wing of Japan), Born: Hyozan (Iceberg), Born: Tokusen Junmai Daiginjo (Special Select Pure Rice Daiginjo), Born: Hoshi (The Earth) and Born: Muroka Namagenshu.

Each Born brand has a distinguished flavor and aroma. For example, Born: Yume wa Masayume has a deep aroma, smooth flavor and sharp, bold aftertaste. As the winner of the first prize in the



Award-winning brews: KatouKichibee Shouten's selection of sake, including the Born brand

aged sake section of the 2003 Autumn National Liquor Competition in Japan, it is often presented to Japanese celebrities on very special occasions. Newly elected Prime Minister Yukio Hatoyama received a bottle Sept. 21.

Born: Nihon no Tsubasa, meanwhile, is characterized by a magnificent aroma, delicate initial taste and sharp aftertaste. As the preferred choice of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it was served at the state dinner when U.S.

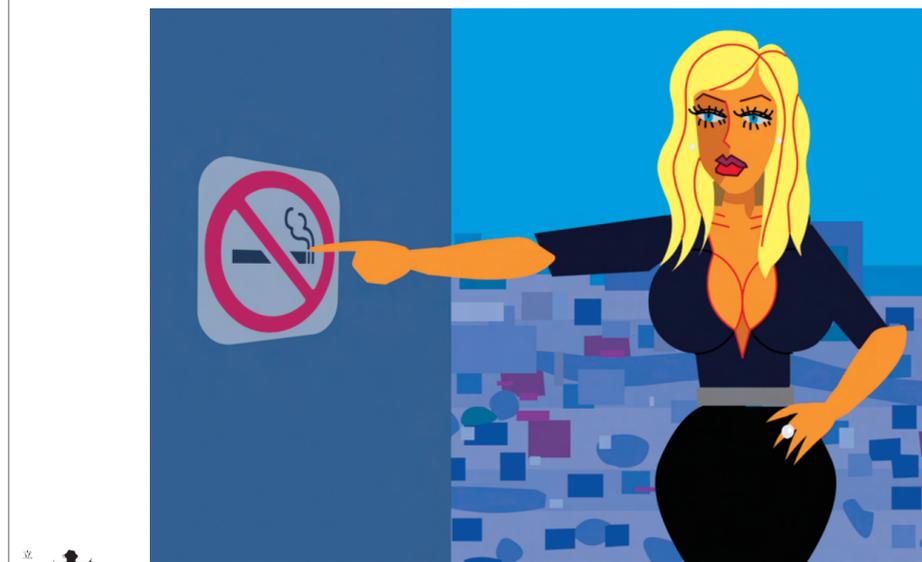
President Bill Clinton visited Japan in 1996. The exclusiveness of this fine sake was affirmed by its winning of the Grand Prix at the 2000 International Sake Festival in London.

Born: Tokusen Junmai Daiginjo, the centerpiece of Born sake, is preferred by many for its grapefruitlike fragrance and mellow flavor. Then there is Born: Muroka Namagenshu, the most popular brand, with a rich aroma and fresh, full-bodied, distinctive flavor.

And serving suggestions? “All Born brands taste wonderful whether chilled or warmed. But they're also good on the rocks or as a cocktail base served with a squeeze of lemon, lime or ‘sudachi’ Japanese lemon,” says Kato.

So on your next special occasion, or as a pick-me-up after a hard day, why not open a bottle of Born? Its rich flavor, aroma, fragrance and aftertaste are sure to satisfy even the most discerning liquor aficionado. Cheers!

www.tateyamabrewing.jp/



立山酒造株式会社

TATEYAMA BREWING Co.

Japanese Artisanal Sake **梵 Born**

Born:Hoshi  
The Earth

Born:Nihon no Tsubasa  
Wing of Japan

Born:Hyozan  
Iceberg

Born:Yume wa Masayume  
Dreams Come True

Born:Tokusen  
Junmai Daiginjo

Born:Muroka  
Nama Genshu

**KatouKichibee Shouten**  
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This is a rare image of Mt. Fuji called Perfect Double Diamond Fuji, and it is believed to bring good luck.

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