

To create the beverage program for Noma Kyoto, head sommelier Mees List crossed Japan, from the vines of Hokkaido in the north to the distilleries of Kyushu in the south, whipping through the landscape on bullet trains and winding slowly through the mountains on a local coach car. The travels resulted in an all-Japanese selection of drinks, from sake to wine, tea, beer, and whisky. They were also a whirlwind of meeting like-minded souls who took her drinking and eating all the good stuff. Through each of the eight pairings created for the menu, Mees relates stories of encounters with the prolific community of farmers, brewers, bartenders and baristas she met during her three-month research. Need some goat cheese in Hakodate? Want to know the best wine shop in Yamanashi? Where to eat the best Chinese food in Tottori? Need a legendary wine bar in Toyama? You know who to call.



Have Palate — Will Travel

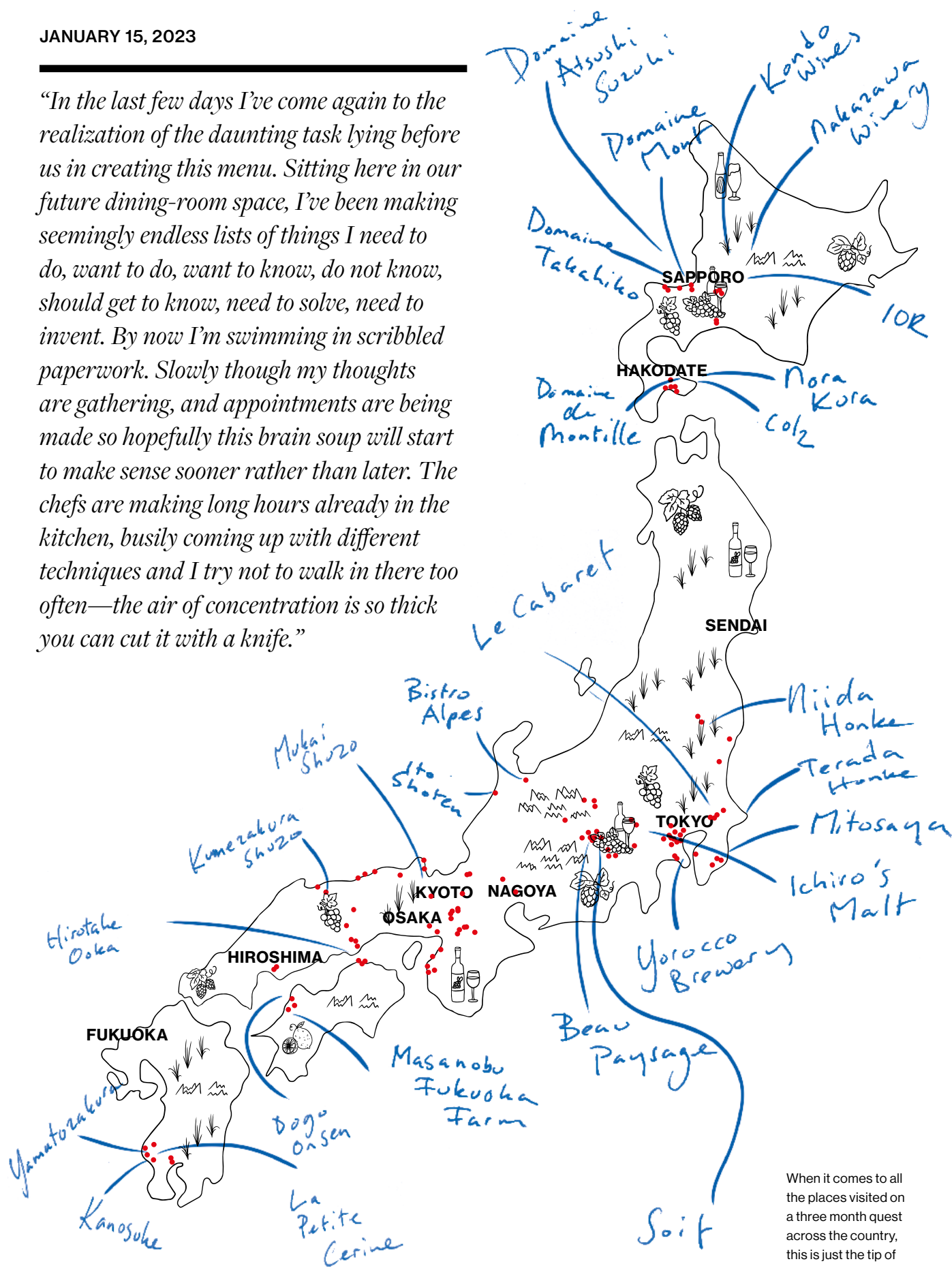
In search of the
perfect pairing

ILLUSTRATION: U YOSHIOKA, PHOTOS: AVA MEES LIST



NOMA IN KYOTO

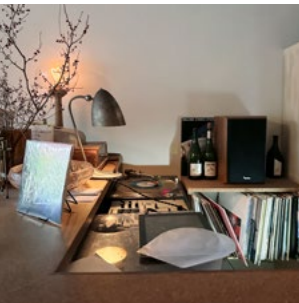
“In the last few days I’ve come again to the realization of the daunting task lying before us in creating this menu. Sitting here in our future dining-room space, I’ve been making seemingly endless lists of things I need to do, want to do, want to know, do not know, should get to know, need to solve, need to invent. By now I’m swimming in scribbled paperwork. Slowly though my thoughts are gathering, and appointments are being made so hopefully this brain soup will start to make sense sooner rather than later. The chefs are making long hours already in the kitchen, busily coming up with different techniques and I try not to walk in there too often—the air of concentration is so thick you can cut it with a knife.”



When it comes to all the places visited on a three month quest across the country, this is just the tip of the iceberg..

WHAT DOES IT MEAN to be the head sommelier at noma for a pop-up in Japan? Good question. I asked myself the same thing as I sat mile-high and wide awake, flying over the North Pole on my first visit to Japan, while the rest of the plane was either fast asleep or watching *Fast and Furious Part Godknowswhat*. It was about a year before we would open our doors to the first guests. Where to start as a foreigner in a country steeped in an age-old tradition of sake-brewing and tea-farming? How to convince natural winemakers so small and sought-after that getting hold of just a single bottle feels like a quest for the golden fleece, to sell us enough to serve on a pairing? One thing I knew for sure: I was going to try, come hell or high water, to only use Japanese products.

It was a gargantuan task to find the appropriate drinks for the event particularly before the menu was even created. There were wonderful guides along the way, chief among them Egami-san of the famous Kyoto wine shop Ethelvine, and Terada-san, the 24th-generation sake toji (head brewer) of Terada Honke. Both accompanied me on most of the road trips. And when they were not around, there was always Google Translate.



SOME WINE BARS NOT TO BE FORGOTTEN ACROSS JAPAN

LA PETITE CERINE, KAGOSHIMA

On the southernmost tip of Kyushu, find this fantastic wine bar with an amazing selection and a Parma ham from Gifu because why not.

BISTRO ALPES, TOYAMA

Owner Zac deejays behind his zinc bar, meanwhile pulling out some absolute gems from the cellar (and sometimes pulling off his shirt, depending on how crazy the night gets).

LE CABARET TOKYO

We cannot really skip Tokyo and in Shibuya be sure to visit the iconic Cabaret and the even more iconic Tsubo behind the bar.

LA PIOCHE, TOKYO

Get ready to blind taste wines with restaurant industry types from all over the world that visit this illustrious joint run by the knowledgeable and joyous Shinya. Also get ready to get stuck until the sun comes up and make your way home while the rest of the city commutes to work.

LEMON STAND, HIROSHIMA

Local oysters and Japanese natural wine, as well as a few other things from Europe. Also, incredible sausages made by a local man called Dotcomm.

SLOW CAVE, OKAYAMA

Great store with in the back a small bar area where you can drink Pedres Blanques rosé and eat delicious olives.

ITO SHOTEN, KANAZAWA

After spending an afternoon at say, the 21st Century Museum of Contemporary Art, or better yet the D.T. Suzuki Museum, and having lunch at the Omichō Market, go sit at the counter at Ito Shoten. Great winelist, cool records, wonderful host! Snacks too—you will need a double portion of the cheese.



SAKE

2023 Our Rice Field

Hidehiko Matsumoto
Nichi Nichi, Fushimi, Kyoto

ACCOMPANYING DISHES

Hassun

WHEN you visit a sake brewery, as in many places in Japan, you go through the kerfuffle of changing shoes into slippers and into different slippers each step of the way. To prevent cross-contamination of all the yeasts and bacteria many breweries make you change from one pair where they wash and steam the rice, to another where the koji spores are cooking up, and yet another for the fermentation tanks and the press.

We are in Fushimi, the sake brewery district in the southern part of Kyoto, to visit Nichi Nichi. This brewery is run by Hidehiko Matsumoto, a young hip guy and 10th-generation toji who started his own shuzo a stone's throw from where his family once started. It is exactly two months before we open for a ten-week stint in this marvelous city, and I am looking for the perfect all-round sake, preferably as locally sourced as possible. The brewery is a small one: Nichi Nichi produces only three sakes, from three different fields. Looking for terroir in sake is not very common; most breweries buy their rice from various farmers and numerous areas, but Matsumoto is dedicated to an approach that seems more familiar to winemakers than sake toji. Instead of focusing on polishing rate, he tries to bring forth the flavor of the origin. As we conclude our tasting, upstairs in an old warehouse decked out with a hi-tech record player, enormous speakers and his grandfather's collection of analog cameras, Matsumoto makes us matcha. I think about the intersection of his sake with wine and ask him if he does blind tastings of sakes as sommeliers do with wines to train our capability to taste the source as well as the variety, and he nods in agreement. If only more breweries made rice from single fields.

Two months later, the full team arrives and with the week of preparations in full swing, all our waiters visit the brewery to understand firsthand how sake is made. As they change into plastic slippers and walk up the stairs, one person turns around and nudges her colleague: all our shoes have been swiftly reversed and neatly aligned for when the tour is over. It is a small gesture that makes the visit not only a lesson in sake-making, but also an eye opener about Japanese hospitality.

PAIRING ON THE MENU

We start the menu by pairing Our Rice Field—a testament to where we are—together with the hassun, the traditional opener of a kaiseki meal. A sake from the rice field owned and worked on by Matsumoto himself in summertime, made in tiny amounts, meticulously hand-labeled, that holds its own throughout all the different flavors and textures that come with the opening of the menu.

BEER

2023 Umi Yama

Akio Kichise
Yorocco Beer, Kamakura, Kanagawa

ACCOMPANYING DISHES

Seaweed Shabu Shabu

DRIVING into Kamakura, the temple-laden city south of Yokohama, the light changes to a friendly yellow and in the driveways, wetsuits hang drying; there is no doubt that Kamakura has replaced its shoguns with surfers. And where else but a surf town would you find a thriving craft beer scene? Yorocco Beer was founded in 2012 by local Akio Kichise on the northside, after he spent many years working at legendary underground club Oppa-la in Enoshima. His minutely crafted beers are marked by their subtle flavors and are hugely popular with fellow brewers and connoisseurs. At Yorocco, some brews are made with a local barley from the peninsula on the southern part of the Kanagawa prefecture. Finding barley in a rice-growing country is difficult, the reason why Japanese whiskies and beers are almost always made from foreign-bought grains. The perfect place to start a collaboration and brew a beer together.

“Can I come fishing for the wakame?” We have just made a game plan for the beer we want to make for the Kyoto pop-up: a light saison with a low-alcohol percentage, something you can drink at any point of the evening. The main added ingredient, we agreed, should be wakame seaweed. Seaweed is fished off the coast of Kamakura and it is also an often-used ingredient in the noma kitchen as a flavor maker bringing salinity and umami. We will balance the seaweed with a bergamot-like citrus and a wild-foraged mountain pepper picked by our friend Hiroshi Eguchi of Mitosaya Distillery.

Akio, Yorocco's owner and head brewer, raises his eyebrow at this unusual question but replies, “Yeah... sure.” The 46-year-old reacts stoically at first to most of my proposals, but when he smiles it is genuine and with his whole heart. And so, three months later, I am hoisting myself into a pair of sturdy fisherman's pants on a brisk but not cold February afternoon in Zushi, one village over from Kamakura, about to step onto a boat so small there's only room three people and an empty bucket. The wakame season has just started and our fisherman is happy to take us on this unusual harvesting trip. Across the water the distant Mount Fuji solemnly observes our mission as we head off to the fishing nets in search of our bounty. Half a bucket seems sufficient for our needs and the next day we boil the seaweed into a dashi which we will eventually add to the already brewed saison. “What are we doing?” Akio laughs, “Are we making soup, or beer?” We continue to taste the broth until we feel like it has enough strength to add to the base beer. A mere 6 liters to 1,000 liters of beer makes a delicate flavor and a thirst-quenching drink.

PAIRING ON THE MENU

I never thought a beer would make the pairing, but once I tasted the seaweed shabu shabu, I knew this would be the best match. Be honest: what do you want to drink along with a steaming hotpot? Surely, it's a fresh brewski.



LOCATION TIPS

VANA VASA

A craft-beer bar and shop with everchanging beers on draft from Yorocco but also other great local breweries like Passific Brewing. Also a gallery with a regularly changing exhibitions. Beware of the dog! That fluffy little shiba munchkin likes to snap.

SO SAN

Next door to Vana Vasa is this wonderful wine bar with an impressive range of empty Beau Paysage natural wine bottles lining the top of the space. Simplicity is key here and the food is delish.

YOROCO PUB

Go drink Akio's beer at the source. It's small, but that goes without saying with anywhere in Japan.



LOCATION TIPS

SOIF HOKUTO

A small wine shop in a building shaped like a tiny modern art museum right by the Nagasaka station. This cellar has a great selection of wines not often seen in the bigger cities, where the rare stuff quickly gets snatched away, as well as some wonderful sour beers and dry goods. A good place to stock up before a picnic and swim in the nearby waterfalls at Ojiragawa Canyon.

TERASAKI COFFEE

Wonderful coffee roaster and shop in the center of Kofu. Better yet, they have a second location in the woody outparts of Hokuto sited in yet another wildly spacy architectural construction, with fantastic pastries and charming staff.

WINE

2019 Chardonnay

Eishi & Mayuko Okamoto
Beau Paysage, Hokuto, Yamanashi

ACCOMPANYING DISHES

Cuttlefish, Shiro Ebi, Bamboo Shoots, Swordfish Belly

BEAU PAYSAGE, on the north side of Yamanashi, not too far from Nagano, is about as appropriately named as they come. The vineyards are bathed in golden sunlight on a late November afternoon as we listen to Eishi Okamoto, speaking with sparkling eyes, avidly gesturing and walking through the vines that have begun to turn from green to bright reds and yellows. The patches of his vineyard are interspersed with plots of vegetables and apple orchards belonging to his neighbors, and in the background we see the snowy tops of the Yatsugatake Mountains. To make wine in Japan, you need to escape the humidity by going up either in altitude or latitude, the reason both Yamanashi and Hokkaido have become the epicenters of the country’s nascent wine culture. Okamoto grows mostly merlot and chardonnay, along with a handful of grape varities including cabernet franc, pinot gris and a few Nebbiolo plants. A few years into his venture he decided to uproot most of his vines to face not north-to-south, as they do in many places in the world, but east-to-west, so the grapes have the longest exposure to sunlight throughout the day, which he believes in strongly.

A legend in Japanese winemaking, Eishi started his small three-hectare domaine in 1999 and has been an example for many winemakers across the country, and only sells his wines to a select handful of restaurants. A supporter of many good causes, his gentle character is exemplified by the words printed on the back of each of his wines, paraphrasing Lennon: “A glass of wine can change the world. Yes, we can change the world if we change our daily food and drink. You may think I am a dreamer, but I hope someday you will join us.”

It is just days after the last harvest, and after our walk through the vines we spend the evening in the home of Eishi and his wife Mayuko tasting the wines as they lay out a cheese platter made by Okayama-based Yoshida Farm (best caciocavallo east of Italy), singing songs from *The Sound of Music* with their two children who go to an international school, and playing *Black Radio* by Robert Glasper. But as midnight comes around, Eishi and Mayuko disappear to the cellar to carefully rack the grapes which have just started fermenting, and then quietly the night comes to an end.

PAIRING ON THE MENU

In my mind Beau Paysage not only produces the best wines in Japan, but some of the best in general, and his was the first Japanese wine I drank, almost a decade ago. As soon as I tasted the sauce from the swordfish belly, I knew it needed a fresh yet round chardonnay, and Eishi was kind enough to supply us with enough to serve during at least a big chunk of the noma pop-up. A real joy to be able to offer this hard-to-find wine to our guests.

SAKE

2023 Starbursts

Tomonari Miwa
Kumezakura, Maruyama, Tottori

ACCOMPANYING DISHES

Tofu and Wild Almonds

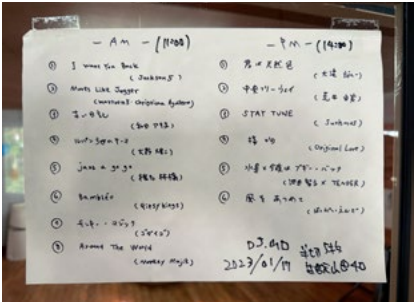
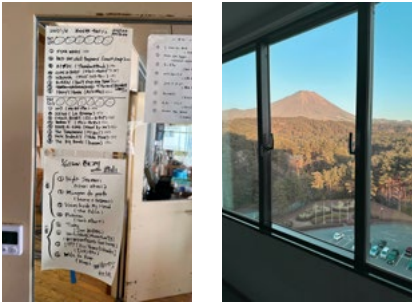
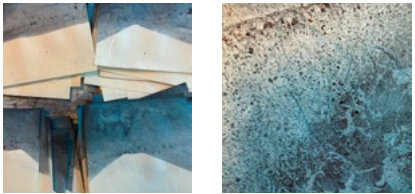
A FOUR-HOUR drive from Kyoto, north-west to the Sea of Japan sea, we meet Tomonari Miwa, head of the brewing process at Kumezakura. He is quite the exception in sake-brewer land: new to the game and, while the brewery itself has been around for over a hundred years, he started making sake here eight years ago after a previous career in fashion. Under his helm, Kumezakura has foregone all use of chemicals and eschews addition of yeasts to most cuvees. He is a tall and sturdy man with a wild bunch of hair, and though he speaks not a word of English, we have somehow found a way to communicate through a slew of poetic bot-translated emails back and forth, and in spring, with the pop-up well on its way, we are finally able to visit.

From the tenth floor of our hotel, we can see Mount Daisen on one side, the sea on the other, with not much but forest between. We make our way to the field where the rice is grown for the Starbursts. From the field, all we can see is the humongous volcano, and if it wasn’t for our hotel sticking out from the trees, I’d feel like we’re on the set of Jurassic Park, a flock of pterosaurs about to fly over the wild valley bordering the rice paddies below. Back at the brewery, Miwa’s love for music is exemplified by the playlists he has drawn up by paintbrush by his kimoto-making room, where the process of making the yeast starter can be hard and monotonous, but The Jackson 5, the Gypsy Kings and AC/DC have helped lighten the workload.

I first discovered Kumezakura in a small bar in Kyoto, where the labels immediately caught my eye; all hand-printed and painted beautifully and not so traditionally, from a large violet-like flower to a blue dinosaur, to a simple design of washi paper halfway dipped in indigo dye. It is clear that Miwa has a good eye for design and loves calligraphy. Even the samples of his new vintage that he sends to the Ace Hotel are accompanied by hand-painted explanations in beautifully drawn kanji, more evidence that we have found ourselves in a country with so much care for craft and detail.

PAIRING ON THE MENU

Starbursts, a nigori sake with only ten percent of the grain polished off, tastes exactly like it sounds, explosive and otherworldly, the texture smoothing out the tingling touch on the tongue. Nigori sake means cloudy sake, and it is a style that is typical for winter brewing season. Bottled with a fair amount of rice bran and particles, it is drunk young and sometimes it can be quite wild, with its yeasts continuing to ferment, making it fizzy at times. Combined with the silky tofu, Starbursts is that little spoom in the middle of the meal.



LOCATION TIPS

HASSENKAKU

If you ever find yourself in Yonago, visit this wonderful little Chinese restaurant run by Naomi Mikami and her husband, who took over the place from his father. Amazing hospitality, delicious food, and of course, Kumezakura bottles everywhere.



LOCATION TIPS

SAGRA

For those wanting to eat local, seasonal, inventive food and drink the wines of Yoichi, go to Sagra. In this restaurant, its charismatic chef Hiroto Murai simultaneously serves a tasting menu to each table while announcing what we're about to eat from behind his counter. At the end of the meal, he stands behind the wines that were served on the pairing, and in loving detail describes them to the guests. There's a wonderful bed and breakfast attached to the place; reservations go quickly.

KAKIZAKI SHOTEN

Right around the corner from the Nikka factory, on the first floor of a food market, check out this popular lunch place for a perfect rice bowl with super fresh seafood. I think about this rice bowl more often than you want to know.

WINE

2021 Dom Gris JK

Atsuo Yamanaka
Domaine Mont, Yoichi, Hokkaido

ACCOMPANYING DISHES

Kinki, Lotus Root

OH YOICHI! A small Hokkaido town led by a young enthusiastic mayor, famous for its Nikka Distillery and for its burgeoning wine scene. We have a big day ahead of us visiting no less than five winemakers who thankfully all pretty much live on the same road.

The first stop is Atsuo Yamanaka of Domaine Mont. Yamanaka originally came to Hokkaido years ago to be a snowboard instructor on its famous powder snow, and he still spends part of his winters on the slopes. We meet him by his winery where he only grows pinot gris grapes. Working as a sommelier when not standing on a board, he realized that he wished to make wine. He started his own domaine in 2016, planting about 1.5 hectares of pinot gris. In Hokkaido, Burgundy and Alsatian grape varieties tend to reign supreme, and there are fewer hybrids than I expected to encounter. Many wineries are small; to remain a legal alcohol-producing company (which in Japan means you must manufacture a minimum amount) many farmers need to buy grapes and make negociant wines to supplement their own production. Unfortunately, it is pretty much impossible to buy organically grown grapes in the region, as there is no incentive for most farmers to do so. It's an unfortunate situation for which there is no solution yet, but there are many new wineries starting in the area, and hopefully in the future there will be more motivation for others to commit to pesticide-free farms.

It is the first winery I have visited on this side of the world, and the wines of Yamanaka are impressive, especially the Dom Gris. Made from his own grapes, which he has vinified leaving the skins to macerate for a few weeks, the wine has a bright amber tint and a sharpshooting precision. It is at least five months before we open and the menu is far from being made, but I have no choice; this is the moment to decide which kind of wine I want to buy, before vintages get bottled and released to the general public. If I know the chefs in the test kitchen, this wine I know for sure will definitely fit at some point in the menu. So, there we are, standing, in the tiny warehouse, looking at the few barrels filled with wine. Any amount asked for seems like too much, and I am not familiar with Japanese dealmaking. But I do know one thing—if I never ask, nothing's going to happen. With a soft smile I look him in the eye. "It's so delicious. Would you possibly be able to sell us some?" Luckily for us, he smiles right back.

PAIRING ON THE MENU

Thank the heavens, I think, as I take my first bite from the kinki fish covered in egg yolk sauce. It is pinot gris time.

SAKE

2023 Mori no Uta

Masaru Terada
Terada Honke, Kozaki, Chiba

ACCOMPANYING DISHES

Sansai

FEBRUARY 2ND 2023: *Today, I received the sample of the sake Terada-san made especially for our pop-up. I sat in front of this little bottle for about an hour before I tasted it, I was so nervous! But we can all rest assured, it is amazing. Sweet, acidic, so full of flavor and so well balanced, I can just imagine it to be so good with some bitter and roasted vegetable flavors of some sort.*

My knees hurt from trying to sit on the floor, but it doesn't matter. By now it is completely dark outside and the rain has started pouring down. Sitting under the high roof of the century-old tasting room at Terada Honke I have just gathered enough courage to ask Terada if he would be willing to collaborate on a sake for our Kyoto project, and he has agreed. I cannot believe the honor just bestowed on me and ignore a sleeping left leg while we discuss what kind of sake might work for our event. It is April 2022, three days since I first set foot in this country. I think it counts as a good start.

Earlier that day I stood in my first rice paddy, sneakers sinking into the mud, gazing at the vast expanse of plant life completely new to me, inhaling a forest smell that is fresh in every meaning of the word. This year, Terada tells me, will be the first time in ten years that rice has been grown here, so the soil is incredibly fertile. This field is surrounded by forest, which means that there is much water and it is untainted by neighbors' pesticides, something that can get in the way of trying to farm rice organically. Terada Honke (this year celebrating its 350-year anniversary), is internationally renowned as one of the very few sake breweries using only indigenous yeast and organically grown rice, a very rare thing in a country where organic farming is pretty much non-existent. Terada, who married into the family, taking its name as his own, now counts as the 24th-generation brewer of the house, and has been the head for more than twenty years. It was his father-in-law who felt opposed to the post-war industrialization that had taken over the country's agriculture and decided to return to the sake making of yore, for which his brewery was already equipped. To this day not much machinery is found inside the ancient building, and from the fields to the koji room most labor is done by hand.

Months later, back in Copenhagen, I receive a message from Terada, writing that he wants the first harvest from that very rice field we stood in, to be the base for our collaboration sake. "I know you noma people like to forage. I have been thinking about throwing some acorns from the surrounding forest into the sake." Hey—why not?

PAIRING ON THE MENU

The resulting sake, which we name Mori no Uta (Song of the Forest) has a distinct sweetness to it—so sweet that I initially think maybe it should accompany a dessert. Until I remember the bitterness of the mountain vegetables and I know exactly where it belongs.



LOCATION TIPS

CAFÉ UFUFU

Satumi Terada, Masuru's wife and the actual 24th generation of the Terada family, runs a small, mostly vegan café next door to the brewer. It's open only a few days a week; "Business days irregular", says the website. She uses the sake lees and koji from the brewery to marinate and ferment the tasty lunch dishes.

TSUKI NO TOFU

Across from Terada Honke is a famous shop making tofu from local organic soybeans. Make sure you come early, since they sell out most of their goods every day before noon.



LOCATION TIPS

AJIDOKORO
A traditional Kaiseki restaurant where the chef comes out wearing an apron he made himself from centuries old cloth, where the food is astounding and the beer served cold.

TOKUSA
Tokusa is a small izakaya in Sapporo with an amazing natural wine list, many of them local. Our hostess served us wine in the most outrageous collection of vessels, from hand-painted Murano glass to bamboo beakers to wildly shaped flutes. I'd say go just for the variety of beautiful glasses alone, but there is so much more to this wonderful little restaurant/bar.

WINE
2020 Kaze

Bruce & Ryoko Gutlove
10R Winery, Iwamizawa, Hokkaido

ACCOMPANYING DISHES
Ise-ebi, Green Rice with Roses

WAY UP in Hokkaido in a small place named Iwamizawa, we find 10R Winery, run by Bruce and Ryoko Gutlove. Their tiny 1-hectare plot is divided into two fields, one with white grapes, Mori, which means forest, for its proximity to the trees, and one with red grapes named Kaze, which means wind. It is October and this field lives up to its name; the wind seems to cut straight through my winter coat and the famous Hokkaido snow has not even begun to fall. Every year about two meters of snow cover the vines for months, a kind of blanket protecting them from the harsh temperatures. Ryoko seems quite unfazed by the wind as she stands tall, prune cutters in hand. Because of the snow, pruning begins right after harvest ends to get some work done before the vines are completely buried for months.

As small as the vineyards are, the winery itself is immense and still being expanded, as it serves as a learning facility for the many enthusiastic young wine-makers starting out in Hokkaido. They can use the machinery, from presses to pumps, as well as the vessels and storage space for their wine. Becoming a wine-maker is not easy and equipment is expensive, but the most important thing is to get advice. Bruce has been in the field for decades, from California back in the day, and has spent almost 40 years in Japan, first as the winemaker for Coco Wineries, and since 2012 here in Iwamizawa. Easy to talk to, he clarifies that he does not prescribe to others how to make their wine but rather he is there to help them during the process. He speaks of influential travels many years ago, visiting natural wine makers in Europe and how important the community is. All around us aspiring vintners are busy cleaning their tanks and ranging tools neatly sorted on the walls, creating a lively atmosphere unexpected in this gusty town. Japan is still very much at the beginning of its journey in wine, figuring out which grape varieties work best on its soils and in its climate, and at 10R they are trying out different cultivars on their small plots of land, including for instance the wildly popular pouslard and savagnin from France’s Jura region. Visiting 10R you sense the future of wine in Japan is bright—and breezy.

PAIRING ON THE MENU

The Kaze 2020, made from primarily pinot noir with some gamay, pinot meunier, and pouslard to finish, was probably my favorite wine of the entire Hokkaido trip. Floral and fresh, it was perfect with the fleshiness of the ise-ebi lobster and the roses in the rice dish.

WINE
2022 Citrus Mix

Hirotake Ooka
Masanobu Fukuoka Farm, Iyo, Ehime

ON THE WALK into the forest, the presence of Masanobu Fukuoka looms suddenly in the shape of an enormous construction of tree trunks forming an outdoor stage, now long abandoned. His grandson Hiroki, now in charge of the farm, explains that 40 years ago this platform amid the tall trees was the site of gatherings, seminars and lectures. We walk on and not far from the podium, stands a house falling apart, half overgrown and sunk into the earth. Through the broken windows sunlight shines on the sink with deserted pans, and wooden beams puncture a rolled-up mattress. After his death aged 95, Fukuoka’s family has decided to give his house in the woods back to nature and over time the construction will gradually become completely wild. For now, it’s a strange almost voyeuristic look into one man’s life.

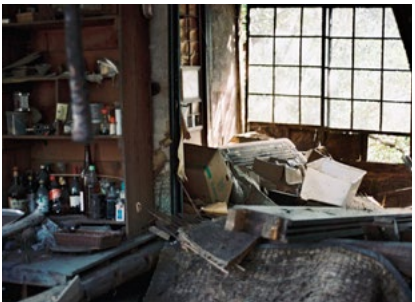
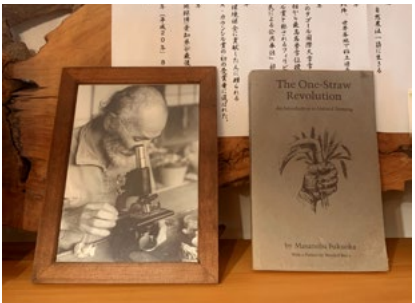
Masanobu Fukuoka was a citrus and rice farmer in Ehime, on the north-western part of Shikoku Island. His 1974 manifesto *The One Straw Revolution*, on do-nothing farming and consumer behavior has greatly influenced many agrarians, notably natural wine makers (as well as a certain red-headed sommelier here on a pilgrimage). In the book he pleads with farmers to stop using pesticides, to quit tilling and to follow the cycles of nature without interfering too much. He makes a convincing argument and his philosophical writing on consumption is inspiring and au courant. Hiroki Fukuoka tells me that over the last few years, he has had more visits from foreign vigneronns than rice farmers; there are not many people trying to grow rice organically, but he remains hopeful.

Later, as we overlook the steep citrus orchards, he grabs an amanatsu from a nearby tree, a citrus fruit that looks like someone smashed an orange, and as we eat its juicy flesh, he tells me that it is hard to sell fruit that is not perfectly round and tied up in a ribbon. To come up with a plan to use the tons of crop, they reached out to winemaker Hirotake Ooka and asked him if he might be able to ferment citrus as he does grapes. Ooka, who after more than twenty years in France has returned to his homeland to make wine in Okayama, is a fervent supporter of the method taught by Fukuoka and agreed to try. “And so,” Ooka tells us when we go see him in his home about two hours away, “one day enormous crates of citrus fruit showed up on my doorstep. I had no clue how to go about it, but now a few years later, what I do is simply throw the fruit, skin and all, in my old press and squash it slowly to release the juice and let it ferment on its own.” The project is perfect for Ooka, since the cycle of citrus harvest is exactly opposite of grapes, giving the otherwise resting press (and its owner) something different to do in late winter.

PAIRING ON THE MENU

The result is a bright yellow, low-alcohol slightly fizzy drink with a small amount of residual sugar and a pleasant zing, served with yuzu sorbet and a small straw-berry and amanatsu mochi.

ACCOMPANYING DISHES
Yuzu Shijimi Clams, Petit Fours



LOCATION TIPS

SANZE NATURAL WINE BAR
Run by the quiet Takuro Shimizu (formerly from the Tokyo scene) who knows his stuff.

DOGO ONSEN
Attached to Matsuyama is one of the country’s most famous onsen. Loved by emperors and depicted in *Spirited Away*, this bathhouse is being renovated yet remains accessible. Be warned: beautiful as the space may be, the water is murder-hot. After 15 minutes in 46-degree Celsius water I sprinted out and still red like a lobster, drank an iced beer in a nearby joint. Potentially the best beer I ever drank.