



**Splendid sake:** Kampachi's recent KANPAI! with Sake Masters featured 12 different sakes, presented by four sake masters from four breweries.

# Oh, for sake's sake

Drinking many varieties of sake in one sitting is truly enlightening.



**Tipsy-turvy**  
MICHAEL CHEANG

**F**OUR sake masters from four different breweries, 12 different, very unique sakes. Kampachi's recent "KANPAI! with Sake Masters" event was certainly a great opportunity for one to learn more about sake as well as taste some uniquely hand-crafted brews, and pair it with the restaurant's signature Japanese buffet spread.

Truth be told, this was actually the first time I got to try that many sake varieties in one sitting, and it was an eye-opener indeed.

From cloudy nigori sakes to the highest junmai daiginjo grades of sake, there was certainly no disputing the fact that there is a lot more to sake than I thought. From how it looks, to what rice it is made from, down to the taste and aroma, every single sake we tried that night was different in its own unique way.

In terms of appearances, the nigori sakes stood out the most. Usually served warm, nigori sakes are sakes that are usually unfiltered, and thus have a cloudy appearance (the literal translation of "nigori" is "cloudy sake").

The two we tried at Kampachi – the Fusozuru Nigori and Taketsuru Nigori – both had creamy white appearances, but were quite different in terms of taste.

However, for me, the Fusozuru Junmai Nigori was the most memorable one. Creamy, with a slight sourness, but with a finish that lingers quite long in the mouth; the warm hearty drink was just the perfect start for that chilly, rainy day!

Fusozuru sake is made by the Ohata Brewery from Shimane Prefecture. Founded in 1903, it is run by 4th generation owner Tomohiko Ohata, who believes that drinking sake is "an act that transcends mere enjoyment".

Made using the clean, clear freshwater of the Takatsu located near the brewery, Ohata's sakes are surprisingly complex tipples that are also gracefully elegant, with not



Shotaro Ota, the 5th generation owner of the Ota Brewery, makes his sake using a unique production technique, which is to separate each rice variety into different tanks to allow the varieties to develop on their own.

many flamboyant flavours.

This principle came through best with the Fusozuru Junmai, which had a very refined rice flavour with a subtle tinge of fruitiness; as well as the Fusozuru Junmai Ginjo Sakanishiki, which was a richer, more savoury sake, but still smooth and sweet on the palate.

One interesting variety of sake that was also part of the menu was the Taketsuru Omachi Junmai Sanmi, made by the renowned Taketsuru Brewery from Hiroshima Prefecture.

Founded in 1873, the brewery's owner, Toshio Taketsuru, is the 14th generation to hold the position. His family, however, is probably better known outside Japan for another major achievement – his ancestor, Masataka Taketsuru, was the founder of the Nikka whisky company and one of the early pioneers of the now renowned Japanese whisky industry.

Toshio Taketsuru, however, has followed in his family's legacy, and continued to make high quality pure rice sakes using traditional brewing methods and techniques that have been handed down from generation to generation. The Taketsuru Junmai, for instance, is very smooth and balanced, easy to

THE sakes featured here are available at all Kampachi outlets. The KANPAI! with Sake Masters event was held at Kampachi @ Plaza33, P1-02, Level 1 Podium, Plaza33, 1, Jalan Kemajuan, Seksyen 13, Petaling Jaya, Selangor.

drink but savoury at the same time.

Still, it was Taketsuru's Omachi Junmai Sanmi Ittai that surprised me the most. The name indicates that this is a pure rice sake (junmai) made from Omachi rice, which is considered the best possible rice you can use to make sake.

"Sanmi", however, literally stands for "sour taste", and is a term used to describe the acidity of the sake.

With this particular Taketsuru brew, it means that the acidity is a lot higher, which gives it a slightly sour flavour with quite a bit of tannins on the palate. This was a bit of an acquired taste for me, but I started to enjoy it a lot more after a few more sips.

Hailing from the Tottori Prefecture, Masanori Yamane is the fifth generation owner of the Yamane Brewery, founded in 1887, and known for reviving the indig-



Toshio Taketsuru, 14th generation owner of Taketsuru brewery.

enous Goriki, a rice strain that was once at the brink of extinction.

His brewery is famous for its Hiokizakura sake, which uses the low mineral, low protein rice grain that results in a sake that is surprisingly elegant.

Sure enough, the Hiokizakura Junmai was creamy and savoury, but wonderfully elegant at the same time – one of my personal highlights of the entire tasting.

The other two sakes he brought – the Hiokizakura Kimoto Goriki and the Hiokizakura Densho Goriki Junmai Ginjo – were also excellent.

The former was a light, delicate sake with a slightly crisp and sharp start that gave way to a nice savoury enveloping palate; while the latter was a smooth, creamy brew that for me, was perfectly balanced – not too heavy, but just enough rice notes to give it a very homely kind of feeling.

Last but not least, was the youngest brewery on the list, though founded in 1909, the Ota Brewery can hardly be considered "young" (Shotaro Ota, the fifth generation owner, seemed like the young-



Tomohiko Ohata, owner of Fusozuru brewery.

est among the four sake masters though). His Bente Musume (no, not named after the popular cartoon series) sakes are made using a unique production technique – instead of fermenting different rice varieties together like most sake breweries do, Ota separates each rice variety into different tanks to allow each variety to develop its own distinctive flavours and aromas.

As a result, Bente Musume sakes are all pretty complex drinks. Case in point, the complex Bente Musume Kimoto Junmai, which had some sharp acidity at first, but got better with a couple more sips. The Bente Musume Kosyu 2008 Junmai Ginjo, however, was a full-bodied sake with a very distinct savoury rice nose that I could just sniff all day, while the Bente Musume Nakadare Junmai Ginjo was smooth, balanced and had a dry, earthy, almost truffle-like aroma to it.

Michael Cheang likes drinking sake for sake's sake. Drop him a note at the Topsy-Turvy Facebook page ([www.facebook.com/mytipsyturvy](http://www.facebook.com/mytipsyturvy)).