



1. HEIWA SHUZO "FUSION"

Wakayama, Japan
(\$26/ 330ml)

Ingredients: Gohyakumangoku rice (JP), koji, lactic acid, yeast, citra hops
Category: "Craft sake"/雑酒 zasshu: miscellaneous alcohol
Polishing: 50-55%, ABV: 11%, Yeast: 901
Fermentation takes place in the sake brewery, where the process is intentionally stopped early for a lower ABV. Maturation and bottling are then carried out at the beer brewery, where the sake is infused with hops and conditioned in beer tanks for 3 months. A harmony of sweet banana & apple aromas naturally found in sake, combined with grapefruit-like notes from the hops.
Storage: refrigerator, enjoy within 6 mo.



2. BROOKLYN KURA "OCCIDENTAL"

Sunset Park, NYC
(\$38/ 720ml)

Ingredients: (USA) Calrose rice, koji, white koji, lactic acid, yeast, 1:1 citra + galaxy hops
Polishing: 50%, ABV: 14%, Yeast: 901
Category: Sake (American)
Says Oregon-born master sake brewer Brandon Doughan, "this sake begins as a traditionally crafted Tokubetsu Junmai (special pure rice sake). After fermentation and pressing, it is gently infused with dry hops for 5 days at cold temps. Initially, the hops impart a green tint to the sake, which over time oxidizes into its signature pink hue. Named Occidental, meaning "of the West", it embodies a uniquely American approach to the art of craft sake."
Storage: cool and dark, enjoy within 6 mo.



3. ドブビール "DOBU BIRU"

Fukuoka + Okinawa, Japan
(\$39/ 720ml)

Rice: Yumeikkon (JP), koji, yeast
Polishing: 60%, ABV: 6%, Yeast: 901
Category: Doburoku + Orion beer
Japan has had a moratorium on new sake brewery licenses since 1962. As a result, farmhouse brews like doburoku and hopped/fruited zasshu (Kid Fusion) have become an outlet for new and old breweries to experiment with new businesses, concepts, and flavor profiles. Doburoku is completely unfiltered, retaining all the texture of the rice as well as plenty of unfermented sugars. To make the thick brew more refreshing, a 1:1 mix with soda or beer has grown popular in Japan, leaning on the bitterness and fizz for lift.
Storage: cool and dark, enjoy within 12 mo.

BEER VS. SAKE: METHOD & INGREDIENTS



Beer is made from whole grain, hops, water and yeast. The grain is malted (sprouted), creating enzymes that convert starch to sugar, then the sugary liquid is fermented with yeast, converting sugar to alcohol in a **sequential order**. Hops are added for bitterness, aroma and flavor, as well as other ingredients (fruit, coffee, etc) depending on the style.
Sake is made from polished rice, koji, water and yeast. First, the rice is polished to remove the outer layers: fats, protein, and minerals. The rice is steamed and a portion (15-25%) is inoculated with mold (koji), which creates enzymes that break the starch down into sugar. Together with steamed rice and water, **koji and yeast work simultaneously in the mash**: koji enzymes convert starch while yeast makes alcohol. The finished sake **must** be filtered before serving (unfiltered doburoku is legally not sake), and other ingredients (herbs, spices, hops) are not permitted.

BEER'S INFLUENCE ON SAKE



Because the rules for sake brewing are so restrictive, and the rules of engagement so traditional, the cross-section between sake & beer is an interesting and multi-faceted one. Conditioning, adding hops, spices and fruits, taprooms, malting, foam and bitterness-- even things we might take for granted, like collaborations, cool label art, and cool names, can explicitly or quietly hint at inspiration from beer. We're also seeing lots of koji beer using sake koji: Oyrzae Brewing (JP) specializes in beer from only koji, yeast, hops, and water. In Japan, sake is sake: as soon as you add other ingredients, it's legally 雑酒 zasshu, miscellaneous alcohol. But zasshu isn't considered hooch anymore, and those who make it behave more like craft beer brands: branding, collabs, etc.

SAKE'S CULTURAL POSITION IN JAPAN



While beer is a wellspring of creativity in Japan, sake is a traditional drink, bound by explicit and implicit rules and traditions. For many consumers in Japan, craft beer is cool and modern, while sake is grandpa's... something old ojisan sip at dank, smoky izakaya, or in a near-ritual fashion once a year at oshogatsu (new year's), weddings and religious events. Sake breweries are old: to be 100 years old is young on average, and usually located in remote areas for their access to clean air, water and rice, making it a difficult proposition for workers as well as the next generation of ownership. Some young kuramoto (brewery owners) are inspired to re-think and renew their brand, such as Heiwa Shuzo, and those companies can do well. But others are in-between generations, less savvy with marketing and business, or hamstrung by chronically tight finances.

SAKE & BEER: FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES



In the US, beer is in a "reset" phase after years of double-digit growth; meanwhile, Japan's craft beer industry is surging. Japan's sake breweries are increasingly diversifying to beer to 1) take advantage of beer's growth, 2) reach a different audience, 3) introduce an on-prem taproom model, and 3) honestly...give their team something new and fun to play with. There might be a future for US beer breweries to do the same. A kojimuro can be built into a closet. Yamadanishiki sake rice can reach a gel point in a standard mash tun without requiring a cereal cooker, or a steam output can be used to gel rice. Beer filters can be adapted for both uses. And, sake is a premium product in a world where beer is struggling against low margins and downward price pressure.