WEDNESDAY FLIGHT #30: PINK!

10/21/2026

Many different sakes have attempted to coattail on the rose fad/phenomenon by producing and marketing pink sake of all kinds-- but there are a few ways to do it, and each produces a distinctly different result. The simplest of course is adding pink food coloring (none of those here) or pink ingredients, like hibiscus or strawberries. Similarly, you can add ingredients that begin one color and oxidize to pink (hops), or those that contain red pigment of their own: red sake yeast, red yeast rice (a naturally red koji mold), or red rice, each with its own challenges and identity.

BROOKLYN KURA "OCCIDENTAL"

Ungraded | 720ml ($43)

Coloring agent: natural oxidation of hops

Location: Brooklyn, New York
Ingredients: Calrose 50% RPR, White Koji, Citra + Galaxy hops
Yeast: #901, Alcohol: 14%

Says Oregon-born master brewer Brandon Doughan, "this sake begins as a traditionally crafted 50% polish junmai. After fermentation and pressing, the sake 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."

2. OZE NO YUKIDOKE "OZE ROSE"

Junmai Daiginjo | 720ml ($50)

Coloring agent: Red Sake Yeast

Location: Tatebayashi, Gunma
Rice: Undisclosed, 50% RPR
Yeast: Red Sake Yeast, Alcohol: 12%

Mutated from government yeast #10, this strain carries its own pigment (as in, the yeast organism itself is pink!) due to adenine auxotrophy: its inability to synthesize adenine on its own, causing cells to accumulate an imidazole intermediate that turns red upon oxidation, producing distinct pink or red colonies. It's notoriously difficult to work with, having low fermentation power and producing little acid, often resulting in unbalanced sake. Ryujin Shuzo has two toji (master brewers) in their small team and are a powerhouse of knowledge, producing one of the best red yeast sake on the market.

SULSEAM "RED MONKEY" MAKGEOLLI

Makgeolli | NFS (special order only ~$35)

Coloring agent: Red Yeast Rice (monascus purpureus)

Location: Gyeonggi, South Korea
Ingredients: Local short-grain rice, red yeast rice, nuruk
ABV: 10.6%

Red yeast rice (in Japanese, beni koji) is rice inoculated with the mold monascus purpureus, a relative of koji (aspergillus oryzae). It gains its color from a number of pigments produced during sporulation. RYR has been used in culinary and traditional Chinese medicine applications for centuries. It contains monacolin K, which is chemically identical to the prescription drug lovastatin, and is used across East Asia for products like red fermented tofu and meats. Makgeolli is a traditional Korean drink fermented with rice, water, and nuruk: a natural yeast & mold cake. Adding red yeast rice is unusual, but has become the signature of Sulseam's Red Monkey brand.

4. MUKAI SHUZO "INE MANKAI"

720ml ($58)

Coloring agent: red (black) rice

Location: Ine, Kyoto
Rice: Kyo no Kagayaki (70% RPR), Murasaki Komachi (90% RPR)
Yeast: #701, Alcohol: 14%

While pursuing a degree in fermentation science at Tokyo University, Kuniko Mukai (now toji) studied under Professor Takeda. For her graduate thesis, Takeda encouraged Kuniko to create a sake made from the red rice he knew grew locally in her hometown, Ine. After many failed attempts, Takeda reminded a discouraged Kuniko that it was her responsibility to figure out how to brew a balanced sake with this rice, no matter how difficult. She eventually succeeded, and in May 2000 launched Ine Mankai, which translates to 'Ine in full bloom.' Red rice sake has since been brewed by big names like Heiwa Shuzo and Amabuki... but none is quite as special and unique as Kuniko's original masterpiece.

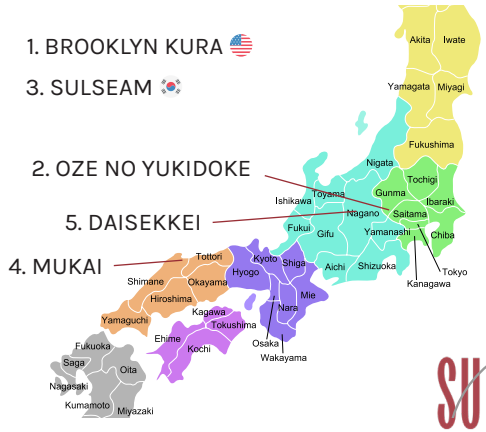
5. DAISEKKEI STRAWBERRY ICHIGOZAKE

500ml ($45) **$8**

Coloring agent: fruit-- strawberries!

Location: Azumino, Nagano
Ingredients: Kazesakaya rice 60% RPR, Azumino strawberries
Alcohol: 8%

In the pursuit of a truly local line of sake that can't be found anywhere else, Daisekkei chose to make a special liqueur with local 'Natsuaki Ichigo' strawberries from the high alpine, snowmelt-fed Azumino river valley (rather than, say, a rose sake made with imported ume plums). This sake contains an impressive 33% strawberry puree and tastes like the ripest fruits of peak season.



Method 1: Oxidation of dry-hopped sake





Method 2: Fermenting with red sake yeast



Method 3: Adding red yeast rice or red koji



Method 4: Replacing kakemai (mash rice) with lightly polished red ("black") rice



Method 5: Adding red fruits, herbs, or other colored ingredients

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