WEDNESDAY FLIGHT #3: GOHYAKUMANGOKU

9/2/2025

Gohyakumangoku was developed in Niigata prefecture in 1938, registered in 1957, and widely adopted by the 1980-90s. Its unusual name commemorates Niigata surpassing 5,000,000 (gohyakuman) koku (~150kg) of rice production annually. It's known for producing sake that is light bodied, crisp, and usually dry. Gohyakumangoku's grains are relatively small and hard. They resist dissolution in the mash and their small size makes them difficult to mill to daiginjo level (50% polish). On the positive side although the grain is hard it absorbs water easily, making good koji, and in the field it is high yielding, early ripening (suited to cooler climates), and has shorter stalks (easier to grow). It's perfect for moderately polished (55-70%), light bodied, crisp, affordable sake, particularly in foggy, northerly and mountainous regions. Niigata became famous for tanrei karakuchi (clean and dry) sake during the jizake (local sake) boom of the 70s, which dovetailed on Gohyakumangoku rice's brewing characteristics.

1. TENSEI "ENDLESS SUMMER"

720ml ($33)

Tokubetsu Honjozo
Kumazawa Shuzo
Cafe, beer & sake, distillery, crafts, bakery, 2 restaurants!

Location: Chigasaki, Kanagawa
Rice: Gohyakumangoku (varies), 60% polish
Yeast: #901
Honjozo (alcohol added)/ SMV: 3 / Acidity: 1.3 / Alcohol: 15%

In the Tokyo suburbs, Kumazawa is one of the only remaining sake breweries facing the ongoing challenge of urban sprawl and rising land costs. They're one of the few breweries that have embraced this change by opening a cafe, trattoria, fine dining restaurant, and growing much of their own vegetable needs. Reflecting the salty sea air and surfer culture of Kanagawa, Kumazawa utilizes Niigata Gohyakumangoku for its slow dissolution in the mash, creating a light body and texture. In Japan this sake is named fuuro, roughly translating to "wind sweeping through moist earth and blue sky."

2. KANBARA "BRIDE OF THE FOX"

720ml ($36)

Junmai Ginjo
Kaetsu Shuzo
Retail only, nihongo tours by request in off-season only

Location: Aga, Niigata, very soft water
Rice: Gohyakumangoku (local), 50% polish
Yeast: Proprietary house yeast
SMV: 3 / Acidity: 1.3 / Alcohol: 16.5% / Futa koji/ aged 6-12 months

Every year on May 3rd, in honor of a local legend, Agamachi holds the Kitsune no Yome-iri Gyoretsu (the wedding procession of foxes). The majority of the town participates, with face-painted whiskers and makeup, while one lucky engaged couple gets to play the part of fox bride and groom. At dusk the couple boards a small boat and is shuttled across the river to disappear into the misty darkness of Kirinzan (kirin mountain). This is the myth for which Kanbara "Bride of the Fox" is named. Kanbara brand is their more experimental, less typically Niigata style sake, often aged and richer in flavor.

3. TAIHEIKAI "PACIFIC OCEAN"

720ml ($35)

Tokubetsu Junmai
Huchu Homare Shuzo
Retail only, nihongo tours by request in off-season only

Location: Ishioka, Ibaraki
Rice: Gohyakumangoku, 55% polish
Yeast: #901
SMV: 2 / Acidity: 1.5 / Alcohol: 15.5%

Taiheikai, meaning "Pacific Ocean," was the original brand of the Huchu Homare Brewery when it was founded in 1854. The Yamauchi's named their first sake after the Pacific because Ibaraki is on the ocean, and the ocean is an integral part of the region. This sake preceded the more famous Wataribune 55 (among Portland's best selling sake) and is made with Gohyakumangoku-- what the brewery primarily used before "resurrecting" Wataribune rice. The same house style, Taiheikai has abundant but balanced fruitiness offset by rich depth, just like Wataribune.

4. KOKONOE SAIKA YAMAHAI

720ml ($37)

Junmai Yamahai
Kokonoe Saika Shuzo
Retail only

Location: Iwade, Wakayama
Rice: Gohyakumangoku (local), 65% polish
Yeast: #701
Yamahai wild starter/ SMV: 3 / Acidity: 1.9 / Alcohol: 15%

Kokonoe Saika is a rare brewery in that they not only brew sake but they also make vinegar as well. Situated in N. Wakayama prefecture in the city of Kinokawa, Saika was founded by Toyokichi Saika on the principles that "In order to make better vinegar we should consistently be using sake lees (aka. kasu) as the main raw material." Furthermore, he also hoped to produce sake that people can enjoy with food together along with his vinegar. The vinegar brewery was founded in 1908, and in 1934, Saika-san began sake production as well, staying true to his motto of providing Japan with good quality vinegar and sake.

BONUS: KIRINZAN JUNMAI DAIGINJO

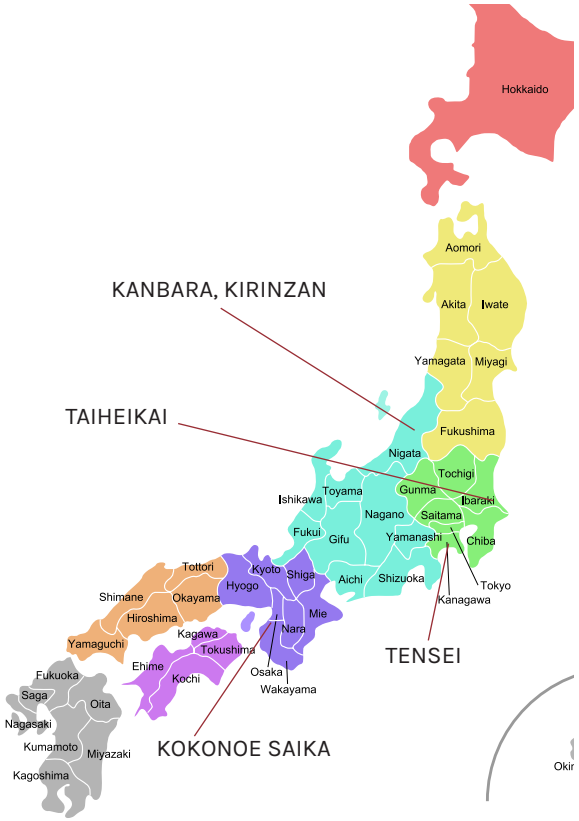
720ml ($94)

Junmai Daiginjo
Kirinzan Shuzo
Retail & tasting room

$8

Location: Aga, Niigata, very soft water
Rice: Gohyakumangoku (local), 45% polish
Yeast: G901
SMV: 3 / Acidity: 1.3 / Alcohol: 16%

Direct neighbors of Kaetsu Shuzo (Bride of the Fox), here is a completely different take on Oku-Aga Gohyakumangoku, highly polished, but in this case aiming for a very delicate and refined profile. In order to ensure the best quality of rice for the sake, in the summer months the toji at Kirinzan works in the local rice fields with his team members. The brewery is committed to using the finest local rice in order to support the local Oku-Aga agricultural community, and in the past few years have moved to using 100% rice from local farmers, grown within five miles of the brewery.



SUNFLOWER SAKE

107 SE Washington St. #121, PDX, OR 97214
web: www.sunflowersake.com
IG: @sunflowersake
email: hello@sunflowersake.com