



Do you like Japanese food but wonder why a country that produces such interesting and delicious food would create an alcoholic beverage served hot as coffee to go with their meals? If your impression of sake is that the only possible reason to drink it is because it is simply what one does at the local sushi bar, but is in general a barely tolerable beverage, then you have had the truly American experience of sake. With pardons to the editor, whose loyalty to Budweiser I can comprehend on neither a political nor aesthetic level, the sake served in this country is the taste equivalent of our country's famed King of Beers.

At the **Momokawa Sake Tasting Room** in Forest Grove, right off Highway 8, you can develop an appreciation of the rice wine, learn a bit about Japanese culture and have a damn fine time while you are at it. Momokawa, which means "peach river", opened operations about 18 months ago in Washington County and they have big plans for the future. At this point they have a small, friendly tasting room (open 12-5 daily) and their business offices in this state. They are still importing their sake from Japan at this point, but are testing rice crops in Boardman, Myrtle Point and Hermiston and are expecting to open their brewery within the next 18 months.

Their brewery-to-be is actually a structure already. It is a conversion that captures, in microcosm, the conversion that Oregon as a whole is undergoing. Momokawa is located directly across the street from a lumber mill, built three years ago for the processing of old growth timber, which they are turning into their brewery. The use of the infrastructure of an increasingly outdated and destructive industry to facilitate the emergence of a business that is part of one of the state's increasingly productive and clean industries is one of the better karmic maneuvers I have witnessed in quite some time.

The thing about sake is that there's much more to it than you might expect. In Japan, where sake is more than just any old drink, there are over 2,400 different brewers and 10,000 different types of sake. Sake, like beer and wine, can range from the absolute worst, foulest stuff, to very intense, satisfying and expensive brews. Going to Momokawa can give you the opportunity to take a break from the one type of sake you most likely have been drinking, to try a small variety of excellent wines. If you have never had a chance to try sake this is the best place around to introduce your taste buds to a different experience.

Momokawa's tasting room serves 4 of the 5 sake that they sell in Oregon: Silver Dry, Silver Sweet, Black, and Gold. The other variety, Momokawa Daiginjo, goes for \$50 a bottle so if you want the best you have to break out some dough. The other sakes, however, should more than give you an excellent introduction to high quality rice wines. One thing to remember while tasting is that most sake has an alcohol content of 15% or more, meaning it packs quite a wallop. Dan Denny, their brewmaster and our chatty, knowledgeable and friendly pourer on this day, was more than generous with the quantities he put in our glasses -- so if you're driving you might want to consider putting a bit of each taste into the dump jar. While this may be a large social faux pas in Japan, careening off the road while trying to avoid those polka-dotted flying lizards is probably a bigger one, all things considered.

Momokawa makes only premium sake. Unlike the advertising ploys many industries employ, this is not a gimmick. There are specific guidelines as to what can be called premium or super premium sake. Premium sake refers to the "polish" of the rice grain. The outer husk of each grain of rice contains fatty acids and various impurities that, when mashed into sake, significantly affect the quality and taste. The more polish the rice has means a greater amount of the rice has been milled away, and thus the higher the quality the sake will be. Momokawa's sakes range between 45%-65% polish which puts them in the super-premium and ultra-premium categories.

The effect that the polish has on the sake is immediately apparent. For one thing you drink Momokawa's sake chilled, much like you would white wine; not ice cold, but cool. Of the 4 sakes that you sample only the Black do they recommend heating, and then to only about 100°F, rather than the 135°F-140°F that is common in restaurants. Sake is not supposed to be heated to these higher temperatures but with cheap sake, the heat masks the inconsistencies in the flavor. I have had Black warm and chilled and I preferred it chilled, but with food, especially spicy dishes, warmed sake could be a better compliment.

The folks at Momokawa are on the ball enough to assume that people know less about sake than, well, almost anything. Upon getting yourself to the tasting counter they give you a page that gives you an idea of what flavors you can expect and look for in each sake, how the dryness and sweetness interact in sake (The Sake Meter) and a general run down on what sake is all about. Sake is an acquired taste, so have an open mind about what you are tasting. I found that as the tasting went on down the line I was able to appreciate each new taste in the different types a little bit more. I suggest going through the tasting in order, and then going back

to taste the first two again to see if your reaction the second time around is different than the first. It seemed to me that once I realized that "dry" and "sweet" mean very different things to sake than they do to wine, I was able to appreciate the sake for what it was rather than trying to apply standards that didn't really fit.

Momokawa's tasting room, though small, is very nice, as are the people who work there. The mixture of Japanese and American cultures in some of the items they have for sale is somewhat humorous. Golf shirts and hats adorned with "Momokawa Sake" in Japanese characters seemed to be in the marketing area between Nike shirts and those fancy shirts with an Italian word on them that people don't bother to figure out the meaning of before they buy. (I have a friend who wore one of those shirts and was told by a woman in a bar that the translation of the word on the shirt meant "Almost a man". But that is a completely different story.) They also have some authentic Japanese art and pieces that are fascinating, even in their simplicity. The cypress boxes, which are the traditional "cups" (called "masu") for sake drinking, are an excellent example of this simplicity. These cups are light, have Japanese characters burned into them and add a woody flavor to the sake. These are available individually or in a gift box that includes 2 cups and the sake of your choice. At many traditional sushi bars, regulars sign their own cup and leave it at the bar so they can use it over and over again. For those seeking something a bit more fancy, permanent (and washable), there are porcelain versions of these cups as well.

At the very least take home a bottle of their sake to try with some of your own home cooking. This is good etiquette at any vineyard where you do a tasting. This type of sake goes with more than Japanese food so ask them for a few suggestions on some foods that would compliment your choice. Their prices are completely reasonable, starting at about \$8 a bottle with discounts for case purchases. They also have small 375 ml bottles for just over \$4 so you can take home a variety pack. This may be a good way to go for individuals with no friends or social life to speak of, because sake, like good wine, has a relatively short life span once opened.

Momokawa has plans not only to expand across the street but is in the process of turning its corner of Forest Grove into a Japanese cultural center. Plans for the construction of a bed and breakfast done in authentic Japanese style -- complete with public hot baths -- and a Japanese restaurant are already underway. They hope to have this completed by 1996 or 1997. In the immediate future they have a Grand Opening celebration planned that promises to be on the wonderful and completely bizarre side. In May they will have a weekend that will include food, discounts on sake and a sumo wrestling tournament as part of a day of festivities. This "tournament" is open to any member of the public willing to don one of those inflatable sumo suits and belly buck with some other equally added individual. For more information give them a call at 357-7056.

In the quickly growing universe of Oregon wineries Momokawa Sake has created a niche for themselves that is distinct. Although sake may not be what springs to mind when thinking about our wine industry, it is definitely becoming part of the business and adds a diversity to any tour of the area's wineries. Expand your horizons and take an opportunity to try what will soon be one of Oregon's newest and most interesting beverages.

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**GOOD BUSINESS AND GOOD FOOD**

By Mary Anne Radmacher-Hervey

Regardless of the product, service or thing which one is in business with or for -- there are commonalities (which I have noted) that these businesses, if they are successful, share. Those are:

1- The (owner, director, manager) "buck stops here" person loves what the business is about and maintains an intense enthusiasm for the product or process. (In short, has great fun.)

2- The thing which is being produced or offered is something that a lot of customers/consumers really want. And not only do they want it and keep wanting it -- but they tell others about it (word of mouth and advertising).

3- The thing which is being produced or offered is continually improved or its quality is maintained at the highest level and it is delivered to the customer/consumer with surprise (thus, continually exceeding expectations).

4- The "buck-stops-here" person chooses and is surrounded by staff (or volunteers) who also love what they are doing and maintain a high degree of enthusiasm.

Musing on these commonalities I plunked myself right down (for an early lunch) in the middle of RON PAUL'S Charcuterie. This reminded me of many bistros in Paris -- although it is noisier than most. The high ceilings and hard floor generate an slightly uncomfortable din. Although it is a good atmosphere to get lost in a private conversation or disappear into a good book. The

noise almost guarantees a certain anonymity. Further similarities to Parisian bistros were the baskets of flowers located beautifully throughout the establishment, the noble breads offered respectfully at the beginning of the deli counter, the freshest and most delightful looking dishes showcased elegantly along the "take out" counter. And additionally, I received a notable nod of approval at ordering a robust red wine before I AM (only slightly before I AM, I will note).

The staff is knowledgeable and accommodatingly distant -- in a friendly sort of way. The space itself is quite attractive with two full sides of windows. There are many window tables set to accommodate one or two persons. Clearly, this is a place where a "table for one" is a comfortable and welcome occurrence.

The seasoning is well-suited and not overbearing. This staff does not seem bent on proving that they are NOT AFRAID of using garlic or basil or -- This food does not hit you over the head with trend -- it invites you to a wonderful culinary dance.

The menu changes on weekly basis. Generally about a dozen salads are available, four entrees and four sandwiches. The current cous cous is so pretty it could double as entree and centerpiece. A short wine list, which also changes regularly, offers an excellent variety by the glass as well as the bottle.

Although I was disappointed not to find a flan or creme caramel on the dessert menu -- the caramel tart with toffee and the bread pudding with whiskey sauce turned my head. I would have been tempted to confirm their last matched their beauty -- but I was too eager to get out and back in the rare appearance of the warm winter sun.

A simple lunch here could deplete my pocket of \$5 -- or, getting particularly enthusiastic, my purse could leave near \$20. The establishment draws an amazingly diverse crowd of folks -- their diversity noted by such signs as age, clothing styles, reading material at the table, and varying degrees of conversational animation.

Ron Paul himself is a consummate gentleman. He greets his guests with warm hospitality, as if welcoming them into his home. Ron started his venture over ten years ago with a staff of two. Now he operates three restaurants and maintains a staff of 65. Excitement sparkles in his eyes as he discusses the growth and direction of his establishments.

"I travel all over and try to learn from everywhere I go. Although I am greatly influenced by the cuisine of Spain, my biggest inspiration comes from the incredible diverse and pristine ingredients available throughout the Northwest. We're blessed to be engaged in what we're doing here. There are few regions that have access to the range of fresh product that we do.

"It's the diversity of this business that keeps me excited. We're continually drawing on the techniques and influences of various cuisines, Asian, Latino, Mediterranean. Also, the diversity of our clientele adds so much to our business. If we were some young, trendy spot, I wouldn't feel so good about this business.

"And, I am now a small part of a bigger picture. I have a management team that works so well. Team. We've got people working with us today that have been with us for five-six-seven years. This is very uncommon in the food industry.

"Maintaining direct contact with my customer is very important to me. I want to grow but I don't want to grow beyond a point where I lose that contact."

I watched Ron Paul as he headed back to his kitchen. He knelt beside a table and warmly greeted a table full of folks happy to chat with him. Several others threw warm greetings and a few jokes his way. It was a natural punctuation to his expressed desire to stay close to his customers.

I know there are many others defining what it is that creates and maintains a successful business. My points are, for the most part, very straightforward and simple. And they do seem to be in full operation at Ron Paul's, 1441 NE Broadway (near Lloyd Center), 6141 SW Macadam Market, NW 23rd & Market. Open 7 days a week serving continental breakfast, lunch and dinner.

**St. Diabolo**