

the crush
TRADITION REVIVED



OLD SAKÉ IS NEW AGAIN

An aged style has made a comeback, beloved for its food-friendliness.

Aged saké was once a prized beverage of Japan, but when breweries began to be taxed at production rather than sale in the late 1800s, it suddenly became impractical.

By the time the laws changed back in 1944, the tradition was largely lost. Koshu saké, aged for at least three years, remains rare, but Japanese brewers seek to revive this old beverage through a mix of traditional and new techniques.

Traditional koshu ages at room temperature or above, developing caramel colors and nutty notes that recall

dry Sherry. But modern koshu styles vary widely. Brewers experiment with aging at near-freezing temperatures that maintain the drink's clear color and fresh flavors, yet still bring concentrated umami and texture.

"Koshu is an emerging category," says saké expert Timothy Sullivan, founder of UrbanSake.com, who describes the style as bold, deep and complex. "It's an interesting bridge because they pair very well with non-Japanese food."

Cold-aged koshus still pair well with sushi and sashimi. But, thanks to their added

weight and texture, they also shine alongside heavier, umami-rich dishes like roast pork tenderloin or even braised short ribs.

And while many saké drinkers find classic koshu's oxidative flavors challenging on their own, the style is extremely versatile with food. Yana Volfson, beverage director for New York City's Cosme, for example, turns to its deep nutty flavors alongside raw seafood dishes and to highlight the sweet and savory components of the restaurant's signature corn-husk meringue dessert.

—Charlie Friedmann

Try these three to explore the range of modern aged saké.

Hakkaisan Snow Aged 3 Years Junmai Ginjo

Three years spent in tanks at a consistent 37° F next to an enormous mound of snow produces a clear, crisp saké with a creamy texture and burst of umami.

Kanbara Ancient Treasure Yamahai Junmai Genshu Koshu

Funky, smoky and surprisingly tart after 12 years of aging. "The saké has a nutty sweetness to it, with layers of umami," says Volfson.

Tenryo Koshu Junmai Daiginjo

Stone fruits and flowers meld with raisins in this almost clear saké that's aged three years in bottle at cold temperatures. The ideal entry-level koshu.

MEG BAGGOTT