



■ A print from the stencil dye series *Sake Brewery in Fushimi* by Inagaki Toshijiro (1902-1963)

Image: Courtesy of Masuda Tokubee Shoten Co., Ltd.

tion thrived in this area in the latter half of the sixteenth century. Toyotomi Hideyoshi (1537-1598), Japan's *de facto* leader, built Fushimi Castle in the Momoyama Hills, and by making it one of his residences, people gathered here and the need for sake increased. Later, in the Edo period (1603-1867), Fushimi further developed as a key point on the water and land transportation routes that connected Kyoto and Osaka. There were more than a few sake breweries that moved here from other regions seeking Fushimi's geographical advantages and quality water. This is how Fushimi, together with Nada in the southeastern part of Hyogo Prefecture, came to be a prominent area for sake production in Japan.

One sake brewery in Fushimi with a long history is Masuda Tokubee Shoten Co., Ltd., which was founded in 1675. Masuda Tokubee, the 14th family head of the brewery, talks about the advantages of producing sake in Fushimi.

"The main reason why sake production flourished in Fushimi is the quality of the water. This area has abundant groundwater, and there are seven famous springs, called the Seven Wells of Fushimi, that have been gushing forth since ancient times. This is very well suited to producing sake."

The groundwater that springs up from the foot of the Momoyama Hills is a water of medium hardness full of moderate amounts of calcium and potassium, and it has a characteristic delicate flavor and mellow mouthfeel. The water that bubbles up in Gokounomiya Shrine, one

The Sake of Fushimi, Made with Famous Waters

Fushimi in Kyoto is one of Japan's representative sake producing areas. Delicious sake is brewed here, using high-quality groundwater that springs out from the base of nearby hills as an ingredient. We spoke with the 14th family head of one old sake brewery about the tradition of sake producing in Fushimi.

SASAKI TAKASHI

Fushimi, located on the southern edge of Kyoto City, is famous as a place where sake production flourishes. It has an undulat-

ing topography, with three rivers flowing around the gently-sloping Momoyama Hills: the Ujigawa River, the Kamogawa River and the Katsuragawa River. Sake produc-



Steaming rice in the brewery

Photo: Courtesy of Masuda Tokubee Shoten Co., Ltd.



A sake brewery in Fushimi



The Iwai variety of rice is cultivated exclusively in Kyoto Prefecture for use by the local sake brewers

Photo: Courtesy of Masuda Tokubee Shoten Co., Ltd.

of the seven wells that still exists today, is said to have been carefully protected for over 1,000 years.

Masuda says that water with a medium hardness that includes a good balance of minerals advances fermentation slowly, allowing the harshness of the alcohol to be removed during the fermentation process to create a

sake with minimal sourness and a smooth taste. This is the reason why the sake from Fushimi is called *onna-zake* (woman sake), while the strong sake from Nada, with its dry taste due to the use of hard groundwater, is called *otoko-zake* (man sake).

Sake from Fushimi pairs very well with traditional Kyoto cuisine and its mild flavors, a type of Japanese food that utilizes the flavors of the ingredients. Masuda tells us that many of the finest restaurants in Kyoto recommend pairing Kyoto cuisine with Fushimi sake.

In January 2013, the “Let’s Make a Toast with Sake!” initiative (Official name: Regulation to Promote the Popularization of Kyoto City Sake) came into effect in the city of Kyoto. Masuda was central in establishing this unique and fun “regulation,” created through the

Fushimi Sake Brewers Association actively appealing to the mayor, city council and other entities.

Smiling, Masuda says that, “Even for us, when it is hot, we often made a toast first with beer, but because we have so much delicious sake in Kyoto, I thought that I would try and establish a custom of making a toast with sake.”

This movement has spread to various places in Japan, and 128 local governments across the country have established similar “regulations” for toasting not just with sake, but with locally-produced *shochu*, wine, specialty ingredients, and foods. Originating in Fushimi, these efforts to share the appeal of local traditional specialty products and to revitalize the local industry are trying to bring about great excitement in a way that is tailored to each region. 🍷



A spring water basin at Gokounomiya Shrine

Photo: Courtesy of Gokounomiya