

In Praise of Fine Sake

Vol. 4

Niizawa Brewery

Address: Sanbongi Kita-machi 63, Osaki-shi., Miyagi
Telephone: 0229-52-3002

- Alcohol content: 15.8%
- Seimaibuai (rice milling percentage): 60%
- Nihonshu-do (Sake Meter Value + dry, -sweet): +3
- Amino acidity: 1.3%
- Acidity: 1.5
- Rice: Yamada-nishiki
- Volume: 720ml
- Price: 1,365 yen (tax inclusive)



Special Junmai Hakurakusei

Text/ Kaori Haishi (sake sommelier) Photography/ Susumu Nagao



The Lucky Sake that Survived Disaster

It's been three months since the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake and its aftermath caused unprecedented damage to many sake breweries. Whether they feel that it has been a long time or not since the disaster probably depends greatly on present circumstances. The Niizawa Brewery sustained enormous damage in the quake, and has only just taken its first real step towards recovery. The chief brewer there, Iwao Niizawa, is a rising star of the sake world said to have "the palate of a god." The sake he brews intoxicates even the soul. This Special Junmai Hakurakusei sake was in fact extremely fortunate to escape the earthquake unharmed. On the reverse side of the bottle you'll find the words

"This sake was rescued safely from the Great Eastern Japan Earthquake." It makes you want to take great care not to waste a single drop when drinking it.

Tilt your glass and the somewhat golden yellow tinged sake drips slowly down the edge. If this were wine I'd say it belonged in the long legs category, with a light viscosity that covers the tongue. A fresh aroma reminiscent of lactic acid and green apples rises gracefully, and upon taking a sip, it has the full-bodied rice flavor you'd expect from its appearance.

This sake goes very well with strongly-flavored dishes. It is also good in combination with the pleasant tingling sensation of green sansho (prickly ash pepper), which is now in season. Or how about something like miso-simmered mackerel and green sansho, spicy-sweet flavored burdock in pork loin rolls, or

golden-basted meatballs? I also recommend Chinese dishes containing oyster sauce, such as green pepper steak.

Somewhere in this sake there lies a solid strength akin to having two feet planted firmly on the ground. Mr. Niizawa is a man who has faced natural disasters many times. I'm sure that he will once again overcome any difficulties and go on to brew even more delicious sake. That might sound presumptuous coming from someone who was not a victim themselves, but everyone is hoping for even greater things from him. The decision to rebuild the brewery has already been made. The best support that we sake drinkers can give is to drink the product he put his soul and spirit into making. What more can I say?