

In Praise of Fine Sake

Vol. 9

Hidakami Daiginjo

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

Hirakou Brewery

Address: Shimizu-cho 1-chome 5-3, Ishinomaki-shi, Miyagi
Telephone: 0225-22-0161

- Alcohol content: 17~18% ● Seimaibuai (rice milling percentage): 40%
- Amino acidity: 1.4
- Nihonshu-do (Sake Meter Value + dry, -sweet): +6
- Acidity: 1.4 ● Rice: Banshu Yamada-nishiki
- Volume: 720ml ● Price: 3,262 yen (tax inclusive)



A Striking Gentle consistency

Ishinomaki, Miyagi prefecture. Hirakou Brewery stands proud and dignified amid the wreckage of this town, which was devastated by the Great Eastern Earthquake and tsunami. On the day of my visit, a constant rumble of heavy machinery in the back yard echoed through the buildings. The brewery was also threatened by the tsunami, but you wouldn't know that from the face of the owner, Takahiro Hirai. His face is wreathed in a gentle smile—not a cloud in sight. Just like his sake.

Hidakami Daiginjo is a special sake that's somewhat difficult to obtain, even locally. Although Daiginjo is usually associated with a strong bouquet, the bouquet of this one is very mild. This means you can enjoy drinking it slowly, perhaps along with a meal. You would

be wrong to think that the fruity taste, reminiscent of pears and apples, stayed the same all that time. Instead, it gradually shifts towards a dryer and more acidic taste. Just the right suggestion of rice together with a clean aftertaste further help to make this sake easy to drink. Not a single jarring flaw can be found in this highly polished gem, which exhibits all the beauty and quality that you would expect of a sake brewed from the queen of sake rice varieties, Yamada-nishiki.

"With fish, it's gotta be Hidakami," is what the locals say, and this indicates just how well Hirakou sake goes with fish. Something like fatty yellowtail or mackerel sashimi, or maybe sablefish pickled in sweet Kyoto miso. At this time of year, however, I'd go for grilled oysters. Succulent, piping hot freshly grilled oysters with just a small squeeze

of lemon, washed down with some lightly chilled Hidakami Daiginjo while the rich umami flavor lingers on the tongue. Just the thought of it makes my mouth water. With this sake's very drinkable qualities, I think there's a very good chance that the bottle would be empty before you knew it. Hidakami captivates everyone, from sake beginners to sake connoisseurs.

Repair work on the brewery is now complete and production of this year's sake finally underway. "Many others are worse off than us, so we can't complain," says President Hirai. I wonder how the brewery's post-disaster motto of "We won't be beaten," in contrast to the far more common "Gambaro," will be reflected in their sake. I can't wait for the first pressing.