

FOOD & WINE

[Home](#) > [Tasting Notes](#)

Sake

By Ray Isle

Sake is finally picking up momentum in the United States, with stores like Sam's Wines & Spirits in Chicago reporting sake sales doubling over the past 12 months. What's more, savvy producers are putting names in English on their bottles, offering the chance to ask for a glass of "Wandering Poet" or "Cherry Bouquet."

Sake Defined

Sake is made from steamed, fermented rice. For premium *junmai* and *honjozo* sake, at least 30 percent of the grain is polished away first. If more of the rice grain is removed, the sake can be classified as a *ginjo* or *daiginjo*; only a small percentage of sakes reach these top quality levels. In general, good sake should be served slightly chilled.

Finding Sake

Restaurants are a great place to experiment, since so many now have sakes on their lists. For stores, True Sake in San Francisco (415-355-9555), Sam's Wines & Spirits in Chicago (800-777-9137) and Landmark Wine & Sake in Manhattan (212-242-2323) all have large sake selections.

10 Top Bottles

Daishichi Kimoto honjozo (\$56/1.8 liters) "It's medium-dry, good with meats or fried foods," says Hisaya Kadoi of New York City's Sakagura.

Urakasumi junmai "Misty Bay" (\$26) Recommended by Beau Timken of True Sake. "This *junmai* isn't big and ricey; it's a little closer to the earth."

Otokoyama junmai "Man's Mountain" (\$24) Chef Chris Kinjo of Atlanta's MF Sushibar has over 40 sakes on his list, including this Otokoyama: "It's dry, light and very fragrant."

Masumi Okuden Kantsukuri junmai "Mirror of Truth" (\$23) Says Larry Mechanic of Sam's, "Okuden's a little edgy, a little rustic. It's like the C tes-du-Rh ne of sakes."

Dewazakura Oka ginjo "Cherry Bouquet" (\$28) "My favorite sake of all time," says Paul Tanguay, beverage director at SushiSamba restaurants in New York City, Miami and Chicago. "It has great structure and amazing acidity, and a light peach aroma."

Rihaku junmai ginjo "Wandering Poet" (\$35) "This has cool hints of pumpkin and nuts, and great acidity," says Eric Swanson, sake sommelier at Las Vegas's Shibuya.

Shirataki Jozen Mizunogotshi junmai ginjo (\$35) Kane Yoon of Landmark says of this sake, "It's like water with a hint of honeydew melon."

Fukucho junmai ginjo "Moon on the Water" (\$40) At Azia in Minneapolis, chef and owner Thom Pham says this jasmine-scented sake "has layers of flavor, just like a wine."

Gekkeikan Horin daiginjo (\$35) Timothy Panagopoulos, owner of Boston's Osushi restaurant, calls this sake "one of the best values on the market. It's full-bodied, but not in the least overbearing."

Moon Rabbit Sparkling Sake (\$9/330ml) Umer Naim, sake sommelier and manager of Philadelphia's Buddakan, loves this sparkler. "It's a little raisiny, like a Moscato, but fresh and easy to drink."

Published: **September 2005**