

TRENDS *japanese*

Why Japanese Flavors Are the Next Big Thing

You don't need to visit Tokyo to buy micro-brewed mirin or visit an *izakaya* for sake and snacks: Importers and restaurateurs are bringing the best of Japan to America.

BY KRISTIN DONNELLY

japanese gastropubs



Just as Spaniards head to a tapas bar for snacks and sherry, the Japanese go to an *izakaya* for little dishes of food and glasses of beer, sake or the spirit *shochu*. Gritty versions of these Japanese-style pubs have operated in the United States for years, but new gastro-*izakayas* are offering inspired Japanese small plates with multiculti twists.

LOS ANGELES

Torafuku, a luxe chain with five plush locations in Japan, specializes in toasty *kamado* rice, which is made in a heavy stone cooker. **DETAILS** 10914 W. Pico Blvd.; 310-470-0014 or torafuku-usa.com.

NEW YORK CITY

Izakaya Ten (above) Chef Isamu Soumi turns out excellent small plates, like skewered chicken meatballs, to pair with sake from the playfully illustrated menu. **DETAILS** 207 10th Ave.; 212-627-7777.

SAN FRANCISCO

Umami Dishes like braised pork with nori and quail eggs have a California touch: humanely raised meats from Niman Ranch

and produce from local farms.

DETAILS 2909 Webster St.; 415-346-3431 or umamisf.com.

SCOTTSDALE, AZ

Taneko Japanese Tavern This new *izakaya* restaurant, which serves appetizers cooked on hot rocks, is from the owners of the Chinese chain P.F. Chang's. **DETAILS** 6116 N. Scottsdale Rd.; 480-308-9950 or tanekotavern.com.

SEATTLE

Wann Japanese Izakaya This upscale *izakaya* fuses Asian and Western cuisines with dishes like nori-flecked fries and daikon radish gratin. **DETAILS** 2020 Second Ave.; 206-441-5637 or wann-izakaya.com.



addictive
izakaya
dish

Stir-Fried Pork Belly with Kimchi

Izakaya Ten in New York adds kimchi, the pungent Korean condiment, to a pork stir-fry. Fresh pork belly, available at Japanese markets, has the ideal fat-to-lean-meat ratio to temper the kimchi's intensity.

TOTAL: 15 MIN
2 SERVINGS

- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- $\frac{3}{4}$ pound thinly sliced fresh pork belly, cut into 2-inch strips
- $\frac{3}{4}$ pound kimchi
- 1½ tablespoons soy sauce
- $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon Asian sesame oil
- 1 scallion, thinly sliced

In a large skillet, heat the oil until shimmering. Add the pork in a single layer and cook over high heat, turning once, until crisp, 6 minutes. Drain the pork on paper towels and pour off all but 2 tablespoons of the fat from the skillet. Add the kimchi and stir-fry over high heat for 2 minutes. Add the pork and toss. Stir in the soy sauce and transfer to a bowl. Drizzle with the sesame oil and garnish with the scallion. **SERVE WITH** Steamed rice.

DRINK Beer is the most popular alcoholic beverage in Japan, but only a few Japanese brands are widely available in the U.S. Kirin Ichiban, a citrus-edged lager, is refreshing with the spicy kimchi and fatty pork.

new japanese imports



Mirin-Glazed Halibut

Hiroko Shimbo, a Japanese cooking expert and author of *The Sushi Experience*, worked with the importer New York Mutual Trading to bring products like artisanal *akasake mirin* to America. She uses the mirin here to make a teriyaki-like sauce that has sweetness and depth but isn't cloying.

ACTIVE: 20 MIN; TOTAL: 45 MIN

4 SERVINGS

- 2 cups *akasake mirin* or sweet *oloroso* sherry
- 1 cup dry sake
- 1 cup *marudaizu shoyu* (see Note) or other soy sauce
- ¼ cup light brown sugar
- 5 to 6 small, dried hot red chiles
- Four 6-ounce skinless halibut fillets
- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil

1. Preheat the oven to 375°. In a medium saucepan, bring the mirin and sake to a simmer. Add the *marudaizu shoyu* and brown sugar and simmer over low heat for 10 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add the chiles and let cool to room temperature.

2. Pick out the chiles and transfer 1 cup of the sauce to an 8-inch square baking dish. Refrigerate the remaining sauce for another use. Add the halibut to the sauce in the baking dish and marinate at room temperature for 20 minutes, turning several times.

3. Remove the fish from the marinade and blot dry; reserve the marinade. Heat the oil in a large nonstick, ovenproof skillet. Add the halibut and cook over moderately high heat for 2 minutes. Turn the fillets. Transfer the skillet to the oven and cook for about 5 minutes, until the fish flakes with a fork.

4. Meanwhile, pour the reserved marinade into a small saucepan and boil over moderately high heat until slightly reduced, about 5 minutes. Transfer the halibut to plates and drizzle with the mirin sauce.

NOTE *Marudaizu shoyu* is soy sauce made from whole soy beans, and its deeper flavor is superior to more commercial sauces made with defatted soy meal. It's available at Asian markets.

DRINK *Shochu* is a vodka-like spirit distilled from a variety of ingredients, such as rice, buckwheat or barley. The earthy Kagura No Mai *Shochu* is great served chilled with the sweet-salty halibut.

1.

AMABITO NO MOSHIO SALT

Seaweed-infused water from Japan's Inland Sea give this sand-colored salt an oceanic aroma and a rich umami flavor (from \$12 for 3.5 oz).

2.

ZUIYO AKASAKE MIRIN

This unusual sherrylike Japanese cooking wine, made from a sweet, red sake, is a step up from the corn syrup-sweetened variety sold in supermarkets (from \$12 for 61 oz).

3.

BENIMOSU SWEET POTATO VINEGAR

Made from purple-fleshed potatoes, this rose-hued, fruity vinegar from Kyoto is available plain or honey-sweetened (from \$12 for 4 oz).

4.

FUNDOKIN COMPANY MISOS

These preservative-free misos, made from white or red barley, are more intensely flavored than most misos available in the United States (from \$15 for 17.6 oz).

All products imported by New York Mutual Trading (nymtc.com).

The Next Soy Sauce

On the Noto Peninsula, which juts out into the Sea of Japan, fish sauces, known as *ishiri*, are used like soy sauce. *Yamato ishiri ponzu*, seasoned with citrus juices, is mild enough to use on raw vegetables (\$4.50 for 4 oz; 212-997-0403).

