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wine professionals

BOTTOM LINE



RANDY CAPAROSO

Today's ultra-premium sakes are as food-versatile as table wines.

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First thing I noticed was that the sake was served warm. It was a *hiyazake* or *re* chilled. You would expect a bottle of high-end sake to be served at room temperature.

Which brings me to the conversion of yeast. But while wine is fermented from natural grape sugars, sake is fermented from steamed rice, finely polished to as much as 50% less than the original hull size. The starchy core is converted into sugar through a painstaking process called *koji*, performed largely by hand in special warm, steamy, wood-paneled rooms. Although the *kura*, where sakes are made, is usually translated as "brewery," sake naturally finishes at around 14-17%—closer to the level of today's table wines than to the typical beer.

The more salient question might be: does sake *taste* like wine? Most certainly, fine sakes are closer to wine than beer in body, flavor, intensity, and complexity—as I noticed the first time I stood over an open, fermenting vat of ultra-premium sake, breathing in the intoxicating aromas of fresh honeydew, pineapple, passion fruit, jasmine, sweetened cream, and vanilla bean.

Sakes taste best in stemmed, tulip-shaped wine glasses (9-12 ounces). If

sashimi. Frost has suggested planning sake meals around fuller-bodied foods such as pickled vegetables, pork,

sakes alternate with traditional wines.

For the same reasons, fine sakes are

Over the years, I've attended numerous multicourse sake dinners, including a recent one hosted by **SakéOne's** current sakemaster, Greg Lorenz, using custom-made products bottled under the Momokawa label. The meal was expertly prepared by chef Moto Nagano at San Francisco's Skool restaurant.

Momokawa Organic Nigori, served with a sea-urchin flan topped with uni. This umami-rich, custardy dish found resound-

is spirit of professionalism of the year in 1990, in 1992 and 1999, he was Restaurant Wine's Wine Marketer of the Year.

Wine