

Sake Tasting

I often get asked what is the best way to entertain with sake and how can we hold a sake tasting that is both fun and educational? The answer is simple really. Just get some sake and get some mouths.

Seriously having a sake shindig is quite like having a wine tasting except people may have less confidence in their sake understanding. But the bottom line is that it is all about people and their likes and dislikes. So the best way to approach a sake tasting adventure is to think about making almost everybody happy. (Some folks will never be happy – so screw them.)

Scenarios and methods for having a sake gathering that will leave its mark and make you look like a hero.

Think Big

A tasting should be 4 or more sakes. Most palates crap out after about 6 sakes, so it is important to have a considerable offering that will appeal to most people. What you are looking for when picking the sakes is variety. Don't get 6 sakes that speak to people who like dry sake. Get a smattering of all sorts of sake offerings. Super dry, super sweet, really acidic, really low acidic, old-style sakes, modern method sakes, crisp, clean, HUGE, chewy, thin, thick, bitter, astringent, from different prefectures etc. Also try to cover the category bases, i.e. Junmai (70%) Ginjo (60%) and Dai Ginjo (50%) as well as sub categories like the three big "Un's" – Unpasteurized (Nama), Unfiltered (Nigori), and Undiluted (Genshu).

The Vessel

A tasting can also shatter the old misconception that you must drink out of little o'choko's (the small ceramic cups for hot sake). Try a variety of glassware - wine glasses, shot glasses, even that set of Pottery Barn sake cups. Try it for yourself. Get some cedar masu (wooden squares) and taste how the flavor of cedar can overwhelm a sake or bring out a new flavor. Try plastic. And go really crazy, as I often do and try drinking sake out of huge glass containers like glass vases for flowers. You will notice all sorts of weird results. If you want to repeat using the glasses make sure to have distilled water as a washer between sakes. Our tap water will change the flavor of anything! And remember to taste Nigori's last, as they tend to muck up the glasses.

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Go Blind

Tastings can also be incredibly creative. Do a blind tasting where the bottles are covered. Number each sake and then have a chart on the wall with the numbers. Get some stickers at Walgreens – the kind that come in a pack of three colored dots, red, blue, and yellow – number the stickers one, two and three, and have your guests place their three choices – 1st, 2nd, 3rd corresponding with the sakes numbered on the wall chart. Please tell people not to be influenced by other people's choices and then reveal the sakes. You can also pick teams and pour the same sake for two teammates and make them find their sake amongst the other sakes. Line the bottles up in the middle of a table. Have two glasses on each side of the bottle filled with the sake from that bottle. Then pour sake into two other glasses for the teammates and repeat for other couples until all the sakes are represented by "seekers". The teammates line up on opposite sides of the table and taste the sakes until they have identified what is in their glasses. They then converse and write down their mutual decision until all "seekers" have selected.

Go Technical

Do your homework! Read up and create a sake tasting that speaks to the nitty gritty of sake understanding. Think in terms of educating your guests. Select sakes that speak to the subtleties of the sake world - pick sakes with the exact same acidity levels, SMV's, prefectures, yeasts, rice varieties, or methods of making. Get precise. Get technical.

Burnin' Down The House

Have a tasting based on temperatures of sake. Pick several sakes and try them at several temperatures. Cold, room, lightly warmed, and hot. You will be amazed how fluid this type of tasting becomes, as the experimenting becomes half the fun.

Fill Those Tummies

Do not forget to get some munchies to help people stay afloat. Think in terms of salty and savory snacks, bulky foods, and items that sop up the fuel at the end of the evening.

Reprinted from September's True Sake newsletter written by Beau Timken, owner of True Sake: America's first sake store located in San Francisco, CA. Beau is a professional sake taster and sake sommelier. Visit his website [True Sake.com](http://TrueSake.com) to learn more, and shop for the widest selection of sakes in the U.S.