

## Weekend Sip

# Forget Japan: Sake now comes from Oregon

## Oregon-based SakéOne offers Pearl, an unfiltered nigori sake

By Charles Passy



*The bottle: Momokawa Pearl sake , \$13 (750 ml)*



### Craft Sake, made in America

Americans tend to think of sake as a Japanese-made beverage, but the vast majority of sake consumed in the U.S. comes from, well, the U.S. MarketWatch's Charles Passy samples Momokawa Pearl, an unfiltered upmarket sake made in Oregon. Photo: SakéOne

The back story: Think of sake as a Japanese thing? Think again. Most of the sake that Americans consume comes from, well, America. Generally speaking, we're talking base-level sake, meaning the kind that's served piping hot in Japanese restaurants as a boozy accompaniment to those spicy tuna rolls. But **SakéOne, the 22-year-old Oregon-based company behind the Momokawa brand, is trying to change that by pushing craft sakes, as in the more intriguing varieties you see coming typically from Japan.** Momokawa's flagship is Pearl, a nigori (meaning "cloudy") sake that owes its creamy appearance and texture to the fact that it's unfiltered. (In other words, there are rice solids in the bottle.) SakéOne says Americans clearly have a thirst for its sake: "We've had nine consecutive years of record sales," says Steve Vuylsteke, president of SakéOne.

But in many ways, the SakéOne story is mirroring the broader trend. Overall, sales of all sakes in America — high and low-end, imported and domestic — are up roughly 25% in the past five years to nearly 2.9 million cases, according to the Gomberg-Fredrikson Report, an annual survey of the U.S. wine market. Jon Fredrikson, one of the principal researchers behind the report, believes the trend is driven by the fact that sake is now being enjoyed away from the traditional setting of sushi bars. "People are consuming it as an aperitif or with food at home," he says.

What we think about it: Momokawa Pearl is definitely not your garden-variety sake. Not only is it creamy, it's also on the boozier side — at 18% alcohol by volume (many sakes are as low as 14%). But what we like most about it are the hints of tropical flavor, especially coconut.

How to enjoy it: Forget about warming this bottle: This is a sake best served nicely chilled. But you'll also want to do a little work before opening it — meaning you'll need to shake it vigorously to spread the rice solids evenly. The SakéOne folks also suggest pouring Momokawa Pearl in a wine glass rather than the familiar small sake cup. "It allows you to get your nose in the glass," SakéOne's Steve Vuylsteke says. From there, smell those tropical aromas and enjoy.