

## *Saké Sampling*

*Until a recent visit to Zilla Saké House, I understood very little about this rice-based alcohol. Zilla's extensive menu lists over forty bottles and offers an education on the varieties of saké from Japan, and ones made locally by SakéOne. Sushi and Japanese bar snacks complete the experience, but the focus at Zilla is certainly on the saké menu.*

*Practicing our "o shaku," my sipping partner and I poured from the tokkuri saké pitcher into each other's choko cup, filling the liquid to the brim and slightly over. According to tradition, with each pour our relationship improves. So, too, did our understanding of saké.*

*Our mission was to taste through the lesser-known categories of saké. At Zilla, the menu is divided into categories ranging from junmai, the most common type of saké found at sushi bars, to sparkling, daiginio, and nama sakés.*

*Beginning the experience with sparkling saké was like beginning dinner with a glass of Champagne. In fact, the process of making sparkling saké is nearly identical to that of Champagne. A slightly sweet taste offset by tiny bubbles finished crisp, and we were ready for the next "course."*

*In Japan, Toji's, or saké brewers, polish the rice, removing much of the impurities that adversely affect saké's flavor. Fats, proteins, and lipids that cause these off flavors are removed, sometimes leaving only 35% of the rice grain intact. These supreme sakés are called daiginjo. They are characterized by a smooth taste and fruity flavors, such as the rare Watari Bune rice variety that we sampled with hints of pineapple and melon.*

*Unpasteurized, or nama sakés, are seasonal because of the live yeast that adds a sprightly tingle on the palate. These rare sakés are traditionally brewed four times per year in Japan, but are available only through the summer at Zilla. We were happy to be visiting in July.*

*If you find yourself strolling the eclectic shops of Alberta Street and thirst for a break from the summer heat, slip into the cool environs of Zilla Saké House and be guided through a saké sampling tour.*

*Zilla Saké House  
1806 NE Alberta Street  
Portland, OR  
503-288-8372  
zillasakehouse.com  
Monday-Saturday 5pm-12am, Sunday 5-10pm*

