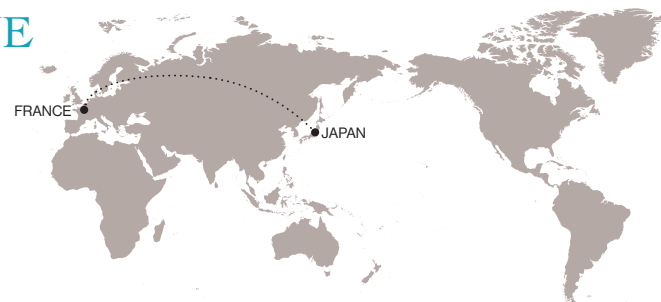




Imai (left), master brewer at Kura Grand Paris, and Inagawa (right), CEO of WAKAZE. Both received guidance on brewing techniques in France from Nadine (middle), an oenologist in Burgundy.

## REVOLUTIONIZING SAKE FROM PARIS WITH LOVE

*Producing sake in France, a young venture company from Japan is attempting to share the great taste and potential of sake with the world.*



### WAKAZE

Founded in 2016 with the idea to turn Japanese sake into a worldwide alcoholic drink, WAKAZE established the Kura Grand Paris sake brewery in 2019. It won the Platinum Award in the *junmai* (pure rice) category of the Kura Master 2020 sake competition, as well as the Silver Award at the International Wine Challenge 2020 for the “C’est la vie” sake produced in Paris. The sake brewery uses local ingredients to produce sake that defies conventional norms.

Under the new administration led by Prime Minister SUGA Yoshihide, the Japanese government is working to expand exports of the country’s products from farms, forests, and fisheries. Sake is one of the important products involved in this endeavor. However, while awareness of Japanese food culture is gaining pace around the world, there is increasingly the mistaken notion that sake simply is a drink with a high alcohol content and is not pleasing to the taste buds. In order to overcome these misconceptions, WAKAZE Inc., a Japanese venture company, is attempting to produce a more vibrant food and drink culture for the world.

The CEO of the start-up company, INAGAWA Takuma, once stumbled across some exceptionally fine sake, enabling him to dispel his preconception that the drink equated simply to strong liquor. Passionate about expressing his love of sake to the people of the world and especially in France where he had previously studied, Inagawa set up WAKAZE in 2016, together with IMAI Shoya, who himself comes from a family of sake brewers and

was trained at Japanese breweries. The company then went on to establish the Kura Grand Paris sake brewery in the outskirts of Paris in 2019.

“I want to produce sake that is loved by the local people,” asserts master brewer Imai. It is extremely difficult to produce sake in a completely different environment with different ingredients, such as French rice, water, and yeast. Yet, with all sorts of information at his disposal—from Edo-period literature to the latest theses and articles—Imai is constantly on the lookout for ways to produce sake that suits the region. What the company is really aiming to do is to make sake brewing “open-source.” By making sake-brewing techniques available to the world, the start-up hopes that everyone can enjoy sake that is—like beer and wine—tailored to their specific part of the globe.

The types of sake WAKAZE produces are popular with local people not just for their reasonable prices, but also because, due to their versatility, they can be enjoyed on any occasion. As well as pure rice sake, WAKAZE offers other craft varieties, including sake brewed with locally sourced



WAKAZE also produces craft sake using French lemons and herbs.

citrus fruits, and a sake matured in cognac casks. Each of the sake variations comes with a recommended pairing and fresh cocktail ideas, making sake more accessible for everyone. “Our mission is to get more people into sake and dispel the mistaken notions surrounding the beverage. We want to expand the sake market and create opportunities to learn more about the diversity of not only sake, but Japanese food too,” reveals Inagawa.

Breathing such new life into sake brewing, WAKAZE will no doubt go on to expand the possibilities of the drink and revolutionize Japanese cuisine around the world. ●

Left: The rice used is from Camargue in southern France. WAKAZE employees themselves visit the growing region to discover the particular characteristics of the ingredients they use. Right: Kura Grand Paris is one of the largest sake breweries in Europe. The brewery receives inquiries from all over the world on their techniques for producing sake from local produce.

