

# Spreading the Charm of Sake in Germany

Susanne Rost-Aoki, a sake popularizer in Berlin, desires to convey to many people her feelings of surprise and exhilaration when first encountering Japanese sake



Rost-Aoki courteously greets each customer. This customer, who came from Munich, purchased seven bottles on this day.

Susanne Rost-Aoki took her first drink of sake at a sushi restaurant in Berlin. She ordered the sake, imported from the United States, to be served as “hot sake,” which was the favorite way for people to drink it in Europe.

She said, “Later, when visiting Japan, I tried *daiginjo* sake (made with highly polished rice) with oysters, but it was completely different from any hot sake I had had in the past. Its flavor was refreshing and fruity, and it was served extremely cold. It also went amazingly well with the oyster dish we had ordered. That experience really opened my eyes to the delicious taste of sake.”

After returning to Germany, she tried to obtain high-quality Japanese sake, similar to those she had been drinking in Japan, but realized that there was no store or outlet handling such sake. Therefore, Rost-Aoki, being someone who, once having decided on something, takes action to implement it, launched an import wholesale and sales business for sake that same year. The year was 2004.

In order to gain specific knowledge about Japanese sake, she read many books and participated in seminars. She also visited various breweries in Japan, and built relationships to steadily increase her knowledge and experience.



Sake Kontor with its red logo. The shop window is also lined with sake to pique the interest of those passing by.



**Susanne Rost-Aoki**

German sake-expert and owner of Sake Kontor in Berlin. She lives in Berlin with her Japanese husband. Fascinated by Japanese sake, she established Sake Kontor in 2004 to import and sell Japanese sake. In 2010, the company opened its first sake shop in Berlin.

As Japanese cuisine becomes trendier throughout the world, the presence of sake is also growing in Germany. However, there are many people who are unaware of its bountiful varieties and deep attraction. By conveying the back-story of sake, her goal is for more people to understand its merits. In 2010, Rost-Aoki opened her first high-end Japanese sake specialty store, called Sake Kontor, in Berlin's Ostkreuz district.

When you step inside the store, you will see a breathtaking masterpiece of lined up Japanese sake bottles covering the entire wall. There you will find placed a wide variety of sake bottles from *daiginjo* sake to *Junmai* sake (made only from rice), which can easily be picked up by those who are interested, and the staff can explain the characteristics of each brand directly to customers. Sake Kontor is a unique place where you can actually sample sake, and it is now famous among the local

residents as well as throughout Germany.

A wide variety of visitors frequently visit the store, such as passersby who drop in because they are curious, and fans of sake coming from other cities and foreign countries, and people who are looking for unique

products, other than wine, as a gift. At the tasting parties, which are held once every two or three months, applications always exceed the 20 people limit. Participants learn the goodness of sake, and after taking part in a tasting party often become regular customers afterward. “I want to make sake a popular beverage, like wine or beer,” says Rost-Aoki. There are still many people who misunderstand sake thinking that they should drink it like taking a shot, or that it must always be served hot. By carefully gaining knowledge about the production methods and ingredients of Japanese sake, such people may lose their preconceptions. It is a great pleasure for Rost-Aoki to hear that “the view towards Japanese sake has changed.” She hopes that as many people as possible will be able to experience the excitement she felt long ago when discovering the “real palatability” of sake. ✳



Above: The store also sells a book written by Rost-Aoki about sake. Below: Regular tasting sessions are held, with the capacity said to be quickly reached.