

# Local Wine in Downtown Tokyo

Enjoying fresh wines under the rooftop vines at Fukagawa Wine Garden.

by **Bob Sliwa**

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are currently being implemented by countries all over the world, and Japan is no exception. Several of the SDGs are concerned with agriculture and consumption, and local production for local consumption initiatives have recently arisen in Tokyo from these SDGs. As a large metropolis, agriculture is not usually a big part of Tokyo's image, but in fact, local production for local consumption has been promoted since before the SDGs were formulated. For example, the Tokyo Metropolitan Government has been certifying restaurants and stores that actively use foodstuffs produced in Tokyo, in an effort to more widely promote their produce.

In addition, many businesses and individuals are producing a wide variety of products that are well liked by city residents. Fukagawa Winery Tokyo is

located in the city's downtown area. It is one of five wineries in the 23 special wards, with one more located in Tokyo's Tama area. Fukagawa Winery Tokyo is unique in that it has 100 vines planted on a nearby rooftop. Because of humidity, the Japanese climate is not thought of as being conducive to grape growing, but the rooftop location provides the vines with excellent ventilation and an abundance of sunshine.

These vines, which were planted three years ago, were harvested for the first time in August 2020. There were not enough grapes to produce a batch of wine, so they were used to make the starter yeast employed in the winemaking process. Chief wine maker Ueno Kosuke explains, "We consider ourselves a winery that offers not just wine, but also experiences to our customers." If not for COVID-19, customers would have been able to come in and harvest these grapes and then later enjoy drinking the wine they were used to help make. The grapes used to produce the 18 varieties currently offered are mainly sourced from five prefectures north of the metropolis. They are naturally fermented in downtown Tokyo.

This rooftop farming program, a collaboration with a major developer, is not just an urban greening project, it is an experiment in which residents are growing grapes to make their own wine. If it succeeds, it will be duplicated in other locations as part of town revitalization projects.

The winery is partnering with nearby Tokyo University of Marine Science and Technology in a unique



One hundred grapevines have been planted on the rooftop of another nearby building.

experiment in aging wines at the bottom of Tokyo Bay. The inspiration for this project comes from the romance that people feel for wines that have been pulled out of shipwrecks at the bottom of the sea after many years. The experiment is to submerge 120 bottles of cabernet sauvignon for seven months at the bottom of the bay to see if that changes the taste of the wine. The experiment was carried out three times so far, with wines lowered into the bay in December of 2018, 2019, and 2020, then pulled out in July of the following year. To determine whether the taste had changed they assembled a panel of 12 experts to do a tasting. Differences in taste were noted and some judges felt that the submersion sped up maturation.

The theme of Fukagawa Winery Tokyo's in-house restaurant is the marriage between their wine, which is produced to appeal to Tokyoites appreciation of clean refreshing tastes, and carefully chosen ingredients. For example, they pair their dry white wine with seafood, while they pair their rich reds with lean pork or chicken. Their sister shop, Shibuya Winery Tokyo opened in one of Tokyo's central hubs in summer 2020. Having their own wine makers in charge of producing wine at this new location means customers can enjoy the differences in the taste of their wines from the Fukagawa ones, despite both being in Tokyo. Next year's harvest should be enough to produce the first wine from grapes grown on a Tokyo rooftop.



The naturally fermented mixture produces a fragrant froth when stirred.



The first rooftop harvest was August 2020.