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Oishinbo: À La Carte, Vol. 2: Sake



Synopsis

R to L (Japanese Style)As part of the celebrations for its 100th anniversary, the publishers of the Tozai News have decided to commission the creation of the 'Ultimate Menu,' a model meal embodying the pinnacle of Japanese cuisine. This all-important task has been entrusted to journalist Shiro Yamaoka, an inveterate cynic who possesses no initiative, but does have an incredibly refined palate and an encyclopedic knowledge of food.Each volume of Oishinbo follows Yamaoka and his colleagues through another adventure on their quest for the Ultimate Menu. Now, the best stories from the hundred-plus volume series have been selected and compiled into A la Carte editions, arranged by subject.In this volume, the focus shifts from food to drink--specifically, to sake. For centuries different types of sake have played the same roles in Japan as wine and beer have in the West, from inexpensive everyday drink to refined single-batch rarities. Above all, sake has been enjoyed as an accompaniment to a meal, and after a revelatory moment at a local pub, Yamaoka decides that drink pairings must be an integral part of the Ultimate Menu. So which foods go best with which drinks? Sit down, pour yourself a glass, and read on!

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Customer Reviews

The long running manga "Oishinbo" (which means "The Gourmet") is a popular best-selling manga series published by Shogakukan which has been ongoing since 1983. The series have sold 1.2 million copies per volume annually and have sold more than 100 million volumes as of Jan. 2009.Written by Tetsu Kariya and art by Akira Hanasaki, the series has won multiple awards and has had a successful anime TV series run from 1988 through 1992. And now the series is being

released in the United States from Biz Media through their Viz Signature. Because there have been so many volumes, Viz has selected chapters from the popular manga and will separate each volume release by cuisine topic. The first volume in the US which was well-done and captured the heart of Japanese cuisine. This second volume focuses on the alcoholic rice beverage very popular in Japan known as sake. "Oishinbo" revolves around the employees of the newspaper Tozai News with its employees commissioned to create the "Ultimate Menu", a model meal that embodies the pinnacle of Japanese cuisine. Both Shiro Yamaoka and Yuko Kurita are in charge of the project and throughout each chapter, the series is broken down to several types of dishes or food related items and how each dish is created. The characters featured in "OISHINBO" are:

Shiro Yamaoka - A journalist for Tozai News who knows his food and how things are created but he is estranged from his father, a prominent artist and founder and director of the Gourmet Club. He despises his father because of the death of his mother. Yamaoka was trained from a young age by his father, Kaibara.

Kaibara Yuzan - The father of Shiro Yamaoka is a prominent artist and founder and director of the Gourmet Club. Because of his prominent stature, all restaurants fear him and thus feel the need to create perfect food for him. Estranged from his son Shiro and despises him for destroying all of his paintings and pottery worth tens or hundreds of million yen. A man widely revered for his sense of taste and feared for his ferocious temper. He heads the "Supreme Menu" project for Teito Times, rival paper to the Tozai News that his son works for.

Yuko Kurita - Knowledgeable about food and partner of Shiro. She learns a lot from him.

Daizo Ohara - Publisher of Tozai News

Hideo Tanimura - Director of Tozai News Art & Culture Department

Tomio Tomii - Deputy Director working under Tanimura

Tojin Toyama - A legendary ceramicist and gourmet

Mantaro Kyogoku - A wealthy businessman and gourmet

Seiichi Okaboshi - Chef/owner of a sushi shop and Shiro's local hangout

Tokuo Nakugawa - The head chef for Gourmet Club

"OISHINBO" is broken up in chapters that related to sake. Here is what to expect from this volume:

1. FIRST FLIGHT - THE VERSATILITY OF SAKE - Tozai News Executive Editor Kyoichi Koizumi is upset that the newspaper company is pouring money into the "Ultimate Menu". He is tired of the excuses from the UM staff that he wants to make sure his staff writers are really working and do have knowledge about food and beverage. So, both Shiro and Yuko will be tested.
2. SECOND FLIGHT - KUSU - As part of the "Ultimate Menu" research, both Shiro and Yuko are sent to meet Shinichi Furuyoshi, a well-known liquor connoisseur who has lived in Europe for many years. He is known to be a drunk and feel that there is no Japanese spirit when it comes to Japanese beverages, that is until Shiro introduces him to Kusu.
3. THIRD FLIGHT - LOVE OF THE NEW - Mayama wants to be a member of Kaibara Yuzan's Gourmet Club but after preparing duck with Beaujolais Nouveau, he is rejected.

Thus they go to Shiro to find out why his father rejected him. 4. FOURTH FLIGHT - A CHAMPAGNE TRAGEDY - Kawasugi refuses to transfer to the Paris office to become the Paris Bureau Chief. His reason, because he hates French food and he hates champagne. And if he is forced to move to France, he will resign. The problem is that in Japanese business, alcohol is important and for him to drink champagne, it makes him hungover. And if he has to drink every day, or several times a day his life would be difficult. That is until Shiro introduces him to Krug. 5. AUTHOR COMMENTARY - Tetsu Kariya talks about the versatility of sake. How he grew up in college and the days of being drunk. But learning how food can be enhanced by sake. 6. FIFTH FLIGHT - THE POWER OF SAKE PART (ONE) - Shiro and Yuko attend a dinner meeting with friends and acquaintances but Shiro starts to get upset when they prefer to eat their food with wine and claiming that wine is best to eat with Japanese food and its driving Shiro nuts. 7. FIFTH FLIGHT - THE POWER OF SAKE PART (TWO) - After Shiro has proven his point that sake is best with Japanese cuisine, for the Ultimate Menu, they want to try to get free bottles of sake for a friend's wedding that would be covered in the project. So, Shiro, Yuko and the couple go to Edo Ichiban's Brewery (who make quality sake manually) and learn that the company the brewery has a loan with has been taken over by the Kanegami corporation that owns many of the mainstream breweries that specialize in bad-tasting sake. The only way Edo Ichiban can survive is if they get a bank to support their loan. Shiro decides to help the brewery secure a loan but they must convince Nito Bank's Executive Director Gintaka. 8. FIFTH FLIGHT - THE POWER OF SAKE PART (THREE) - Shiro tries to convince Nito Bank's Executive Director that by supporting smaller breweries that make quality sake, that it would be a positive thing. But Gintaka believes that companies that make a profit are those that can pay back their loan and thus is a bit hard headed about giving any financial support to Edo Ichiban. 9. FIFTH FLIGHT - THE POWER OF SAKE PART (FOUR) - Shiro's father Kaibara arrives and convinces Gintaka that the bank should not support the sake industries because they are embroiled into something quite political. When it seems all is lost, Shiro tries to get his friend Hozume Sensei, the greatest authority on sake to help him out. 10. FIFTH FLIGHT - THE POWER OF SAKE PART (FIVE) - Hozume Sensei teaches Shiro, Yuko and friends about various bars that are serving quality sake. And giving Shiro enough information and a chance to show Nito Bank why they should give out a loan to Edo Ichiban. 11. FIFTH FLIGHT - THE POWER OF SAKE PART (SIX) - Shiro invites the main decision makers at Nito Bank and Shiro's father to show that there are business owners who are not interested in making a quick profit and are in business to sell the best sake possible. Also, taking them to a sake tasting club and hoping Nito Bank will learn that there is a market for quality sake. 12. SIXTH FLIGHT - A NEW START - Shiro visits his local bar and meets Setsuko

Kitahara who has been hired as help. The problem is her boyfriend, a painter comes into her work all drunk and disruptive. Shiro decides to challenge the young painter.

13. NOTES ON THE TEXT

This segment is a resource for Japanese terminology used in the book.

JUDGMENT CALL: As a person who loves Japanese cooking and admiring what goes on behind the scenes in preparing the food, it was great to actually learn more about the beverage side, specifically about sake. I have always been the type of guy to bring friends and talk about wine, but when it came to Japanese cuisine, having drunk sake in Japan, to tell you the truth, I knew nothing about the beverage. In hindsight, I wish I had the knowledge I have now after reading this book because I can probably enjoy things much better. There have been so many classic and best-selling manga from Japan that I have wished that America would take their chances on. But when Viz announced the release of "OISHINBO", I was surprised because the manga tends to skew to those who have a passion towards food, beverages and learning about Japanese culture especially in its relation to food. This latest volume was so informative and enjoyable. The graphic novel kicks off with recipes on how to make "Sansho Kombu" and "Beef Short Ribs in Miso" but to have stories focused on wine, champagne and sake was actually quite impressive. Again, I learned a lot! When it comes to sake, it's interesting because I have to admit that I am like one of the characters in the manga series who had only a preference towards wine. When I was in Japan, I've had the opportunity to sit with distinguished company and drink expensive sake. But being a Westerner and also a college student at the time, I never understood the concept of the taste of sake. In fact, I was ignorant in thinking that sake is sake and never thought about the concept of quality vs. mainstream sake. "OISHINBO - Sake" was an eye opener because I never realized what has been transpiring behind-the-scenes of the sake industry in Japan and the concept of Sanzoshu, Futushu and Junmaishu. Now, after reading this manga, I feel that if I go back to Japan, I want to experience the sake referenced in this book because if it can enhance the flavor of Japanese cuisine, I would like to experience the best combination of sake and cuisine if possible. Although, "OISHINBO" is not of a certain art style that many other contemporary manga are today, the strength of "OISHINBO" is in its well-written storyline and how artwork is utilized to make the story seem real. If anything, I found "OISHINBO - Sake" to be quite enjoyable and afterwards, the manga left me craving for more. The next volume that OISHINBO will focus on next is "Ramen" (May 2009). If the first two graphic novels were this enjoyable and fun to read (and to learn from), I look forward to the next volume. "OISHINBO - Sake" is highly recommended!

I somehow thought I would learn more about Japanese food and drink from this volume, one of

several compiling the episodes in a long-running serial. But the info is doled out in tiny tidbits, and the underlying plot becomes repetitive and tedious, as is inevitable when a serial is reassembled into a book. After a while you just don't care anymore about the tension between the young reporter hero and his father or his bosses, even if it does involve fine food and sake. Oh well.

Even though this series is written in the manga style, I learn something new about the history of Japanese cuisine with every volume. There are even 1 or 2 recipes included at the end of each book. Even read in order, the back story of the individual characters is still a bit disjointed and hard to follow. The back stories are not that closely interwoven into the culinary stories, so character development comes in second to food. So, if you are looking for a manga story with food thrown in, try elsewhere. If you want to know more about how the Japanese developed their cuisine and a bit of their food culture, this short series may do just fine.

This is one of the most informative Oishinbo's in my opinion. It points out things about sake I never knew, such as the usage of brewer's alcohol throughout the industry. I wish more of Oishinbo would be translated. As with the others, this one is a collection so the timelines are a bit jumbled throughout the books.

Love this series. I wish more of the series would get translated to English. Although this is probably the most incongruent of the books in the English translations it is still worth reading. Although labeled as a Sake volume the book lacks unity and meanders away from Sake as its core topic. If you are interested in reading Oishinbo I would not start with this volume but this still has interesting information.

Another manga in the Japanese food culture series. Done as a comic, this book serves to educate (lecture?) the audience about the delights of Japanese cuisine. This book deals specifically with sake, and its virtues over that of wine and champagne. For example, the French have got it all wrong. Wine is unsuitable for seafood - Sake is. There are different grades of sake and the Japanese arcane system of grading sake is explained. However, as an outsider, these terms and nomenclature are merely theoretical to me. Anyway, the pleasures of Japanese sake are defined with emoticons, done as mie by the manga characters. Oiiisheeee!

If you already studied / learned something about Sake, you will have some fun reading it. If you don't

know anything about Sake, maybe you will learn part of the basics. However to make it an easier story to read, the author oversimplified some concepts and some truths. Still a fun story. I recommend.

I bought this book as I have this crazy notion to become a sake sommelier. This was one of the books I've purchased, and the first one to arrive. I have to say that I've only just begun the book, but I've already learnt so much! Comic book format is surprisingly effective. A pleasure to read, and a wealth of information!

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