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Sake shop at Chef's Armoury

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Get some regionally matched sake and Japanese steel at the Chef's Armoury

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First published on 12 Dec 2013. Updated on 16 Dec 2013.

Leigh Hudson is a massive Japophile. For years, the founder of **Chef's Armoury** (Richmond's purveyor of fine Japanese steel, cookware and snacks) has been travelling to Sakai Takayuki in Japan to learn the ancient craft of knife sharpening, while simultaneously imbibing sake, and collecting an arsenal of wares.

If you've never been to the Richmond store (or at least perved and its goods online), drop what you're doing and go right now. Every item from the dully glinting blades protruding from handles of carved mahogany to jars of real wasabi –stuff that could maim at 50 paces – and beautiful books dedicated to Japan's preeminent sushi master, Jiro Ono, reflects the Japanese reverence for minimalist perfection. Which, as of recently, includes a tsunami of the best sakes, beers and aged mirins you'll find in this country.

They cover all bases here in terms of style and price range. And the good news for you, enthusiastic-yet-slightly-bemused-would-be sake drinker, is that they're also doing everything possible to demystify the goods.

"The main obstacle people face is that the labels are all in Japanese, so they don't even know where to start," explains Hudson.

So, he's created an idiot-proof label system showing where each bottle falls on sweet, fruity, dry and flavour-intensity spectrum on sliding scales so even if you don't know what the hell daiginjo means, (or if you're shopping online) you can still land something you'll like.

There's an Oni Koroshi Demon Slayer sake by Oita brewery – a style which roughly translates as 'boiling hot with rage' due to its dryness (which wasn't historically popular in Japan). It's simultaneously floral and briny and a little like a dry sherry without the raisins. Up the melon and honeysuckle end of the spectrum you've got a delicate unpasteurized number with the musky scent of a crushed beetle. Or how about some mirin? Sure it's typically a cooking wine, but they have thick, caramel-coloured aged gear here that smells like soy sauce, but is syrupy sweet.

The crew are on hand to give you a thorough briefing and usually have a couple of bottles open to try. They're also holding full tasting sessions once a month to give you a proper idea of the spectrum, and teach you what to look for.

Perhaps the nicest thing of all is that because Hudson has arranged the importation directly with brewers in the towns where he gets the store's steel, it means you can go home with a matching knife and sake set. Merry Christmas, kitchen fans.



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