

WINE GATHERING 101

As the holiday party season approaches, these quick tips excerpted from wine coach Laurie Forster's book, *The Sipping Point: A Crash Course in Wine*, will help you plan your next gathering.

Stand up and be counted. For a few hours of chatting and snacking, assume each wine-drinking guest will consume a five-ounce glass every hour.

How much of which? How much of white, red or sparkling? It will vary by season. In general, it's now estimated that 60 percent of people prefer red to white.

Go dutch? A great way to have a fabulous party that won't break the bank is to invite everyone to bring a bottle of wine and an appetizer. Pick a theme (Australian Shiraz, whites under \$20) and have an instant tasting party.



LUXE LIFE

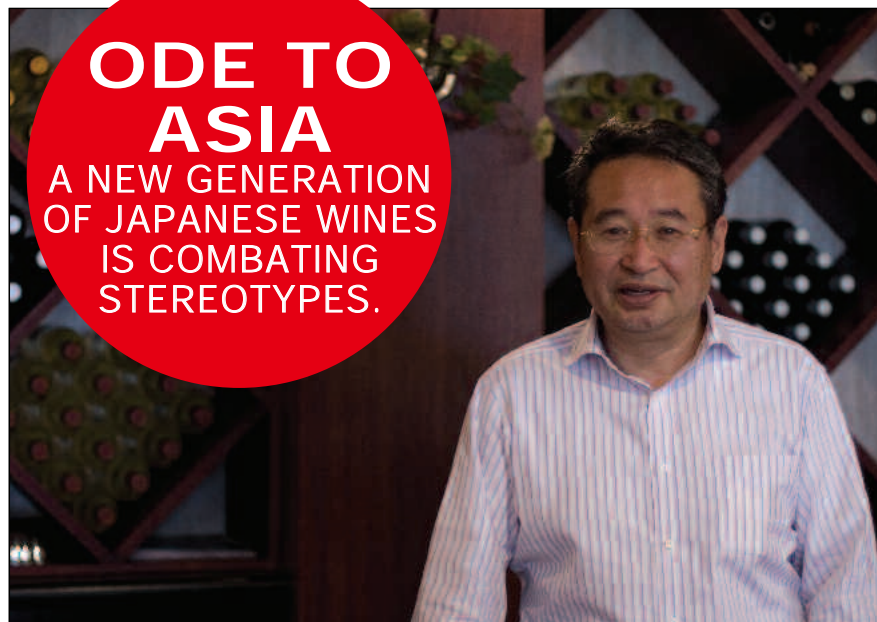
SELVA NEGRA MOUNTAIN RESORT

Jonesing for an authentic java experience? Try Selva Negra Mountain Resort and Coffee Estate in the central highlands of Nicaragua. Roll up your chinos and start prospecting for Nicaraguan black gold: coffee. Fifth generation coffee growers Mausí and Eddy Kúhl run a 1,300-acre organic farm where guests learn firsthand how their rich, shade-grown coffee is made from seed to cup. You'd be hard pressed to find caffeine with a better conscience: they're certified by the Rainforest Alliance and have been awarded for their sustainability efforts by the Specialty Coffee Association of America. Come for the harvest from November to February and rent a private chalet at 4,000 feet. Gaze at the lake from the terrace while feasting on a manchego cheese plate and homemade sausages from pigs raised on site. Spend the afternoon horseback riding, hiking amid cloud forests, bird watching or ogling the dozens of orchid species in the surrounding countryside. For information and current prices, go to www.selvanegra.com. —EMILY HAILE



ODE TO ASIA

A NEW GENERATION OF JAPANESE WINES IS COMBATING STEREOTYPES.



Japanese wine gets a bad rap. Hot, humid summers, poor soil conditions and years of producing hyper-sweet style cordons—yielding fewer, but superior, grapes.

wines have not helped. But in recent years there have been leaps in quality, not only in vinification of European varietals, but also of Koshu, a grape native to China but long cultivated in Japan. Koshu's beguiling character is unleashing the creativity of a new generation of Japanese winemakers.

Just north of Mount Fuji is Yamanashi, perhaps the most renowned of Japan's several wine growing regions. Among the most innovative of the dozens of winemakers here is Grace Wineries, which is earning a worldwide reputation for its distinctive Koshus.

Robert Parker has already given Grace's wines high marks. However, in the last few years, owner Shigekazu Misawa has been raising the bar even higher. He's now head of the Yamanashi Vintners' Cooperative Association, challenging winemakers throughout Japan to improve their product. Looking for the best terroir, he's planted the new Toribira vineyard high on the hill above his winery in Katsunuma, and he's broken with the Japanese tradition of training vines into overhead arbors to more European

A fifth-generation winemaker, with a son and daughter primed to succeed him in the business, Misawa has also embarked on a very personal research project, working with oenologists at UC Davis and the University of Bordeaux to trace the DNA of Koshu. "We know that it is about 95 percent Chinese in origin," he says. "I want to find out about that other 5 percent. After all, everyone wants to know where they came from and it's no different with grapes."

And what about the wines themselves? Sometimes described as a cross between Gewürztraminer and Semillon Blanc, Koshu is neither—and a bit more. It's a summery wine with a character that is distinctly Japanese. Grace's Koshus tend toward the austere, born to be paired with the subtle nuances of Japanese cuisine. Through increased marketing efforts in Europe and the United States, Misawa hopes that wine lovers everywhere will soon be able to experience the marriage of Japanese food and wine for themselves. For information, go to www.grace-wine.co.jp/or www.kizan.co.jp.

—VIRGINIA SORRELLS AND NICHOLAS VROMAN