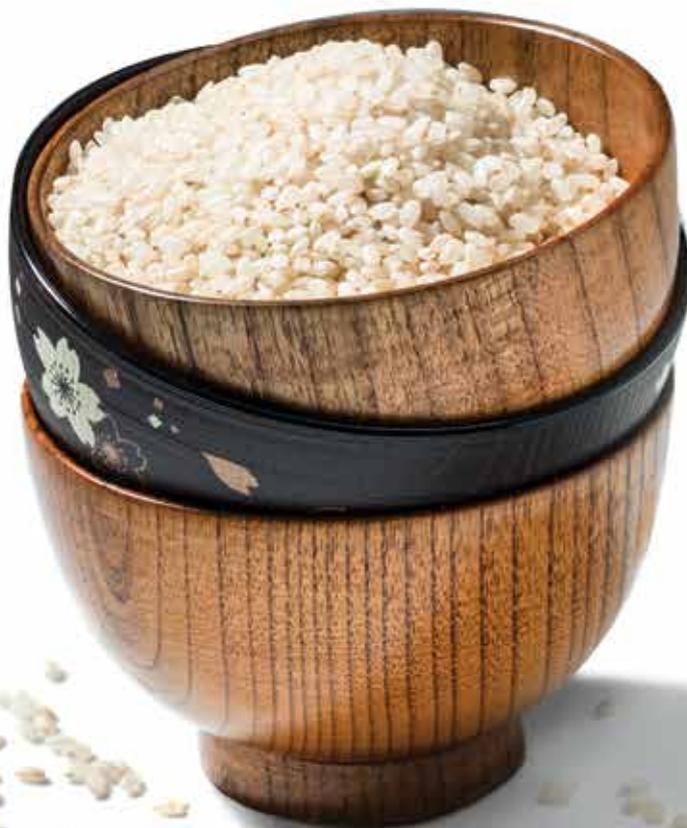




NICK KIM

This NYC sushi chef coaxes perfection from artisanal Japanese rice.

NICK KIM'S EYES shine like those of a schoolboy with a crush when he talks about Kinmemai white rice. Grown in Japan's Nagano Prefecture, a region known for having clean mountain water and excellent terroir, the rice is polished using a radical process that leaves the sprout of each grain intact, vastly improving consistency and nutritional value. "Texture is always key when making sushi," says Kim. "The beauty with Kinmemai is that it holds up. Texturally, it's all there." Kim and his partner, Jimmy Lau, long conspired to find the perfect rice to serve at Shuko, their omakase- and kaseiki-style sushi restaurant in Union Square. The search ended when they discovered Kinmemai. Now the challenge lies in learning the grain's unique nuances. "We're tasting the rice all the time," says Kim. "It's really like a brand-new relationship. Right now, we're still holding hands." But Kim is definitely smitten with Kinmemai. "In sushi restaurants, rice is king. We could have the best fish in the world, but if the rice isn't good, it isn't going to make sense." — **GINA DECAPRIO VERCESI**



- ▶ **There are** more than 40,000 varieties of rice, a crop that's cultivated on every continent except Antarctica.
- ▶ **Rice** has long been seen as a symbol of fertility, which is why it's frequently showered over newlyweds.
- ▶ **In Japanese**, the word for "rice" and for "meal" is the same: *gohan*.

GO WITH THE GRAIN

Rice turns up in festivals and bottles and even at the famous Mouse House.



1 Oxen decorated with flowers pull wooden plows at Osaka, Japan's **Otahua Rice Planting Festival**, Sumiyoshi no Otaue, each June.



2 San Francisco-based **Sequoia Sake** brews only pure varieties of the drink using water, rice, *koji*—a type of fungus—and yeast.



3 At **Goofy's Candy Company** at Orlando's Walt Disney World Resort, you can bedeck Mickey-shaped crisped rice treats with toppings.