

TASTE TEST



PHOTO: CHRIS PEARCE

Liquid Happiness

THE JOY OF SAKE BRINGS SERIOUS MIRTH TO MANHATTAN

by Rich Manning

How do you serve 512 sakés to a throng of hot, thirsty New Yorkers on the longest day of the year?

With eyedroppers, that's how—copious amounts of them.

The optometric doodads played a key role at the 15th annual Joy of Sake, a public tasting held at Manhattan's Metropolitan Pavilion on June 21. First, they helped prevent tipsiness, as did the abundant water stations and killer Asian cuisine whipped up by Morimoto, Momofuku, 15 East, and 16 other culinary heavyweights. Second, and just as important, those micropotions kept palates fresh throughout the three-hour gathering, providing attendees ample chance to discover the nuances and complexities of each label—the last no less than the first.

As joyful as every sip may have been, they carried an undercurrent of seriousness: Each of the daiginjos, ginjos, and junmais presented via

eyedropper had been submitted to the U.S. National Sake Appraisal board earlier in the year for evaluation. “The appraisal is a blind tasting over three days, with nine judges from Japan and two from the U.S.,” explains Chris Pearce, founder of both the U.S. National Sake Appraisal and The Joy of Sake (which also makes annual stops in Honolulu and Tokyo). “It’s a tough competition, and brewers send only their best saké. The entries are kept in perfect condition in an unbroken chill chain for both the judging and The Joy of Sake. As a result, the saké is at its peak in terms of aroma, balance, flavor, and overall impression.”

This year, 151 labels hauled in gold awards and 124 took home silvers. Their collective excellence was met by curiosity and appreciation from the sophisticated New York crowd, a fact that wasn't lost on event sponsors like Oregon-based brand SakéOne. “It's

such a great opportunity to learn from engaged consumers,” explained Paul Englert, SakéOne's Director of Sales and Marketing. “By presenting at The Joy of Sake, we get to hear [about] what they like and what they dislike. In some ways, it's like one big research focus group.” Englert also cited generational attitude shifts in explaining the event's importance. “Millennials tend to be more objective and open-minded when it comes to saké,” he said. “They don't like people telling them what they should and should not like; they want to make that call on their own. That was proved by how we were received—not one person hesitated to try our sakés when they found out we were an American brand.”

Englert's comments about savvy consumers made sense—after all, nobody balked at the use of eyedroppers, either. See our review of SakéOne's portfolio on page 132. ■■