

With Click and Chirrup in Hakone

Story and Photos by Bill Tingey

It is only in the last few years that the Japanese have taken to keeping pedigree dogs as real household pets. Cats, too, are now very often pampered members of a family, although some are still left to roam at will.

Small birds, of course, have long been kept but the keeping of some insects both in Asia and Japan is more singular.

During Japan's Heian period spanning almost four hundred years from 794, courtiers would venture out into the countryside around Kyoto, collect crickets and take them back to enjoy their chirruping in the comfort of the palace.

Such "palace rambles" showed just how much interest there was in nature as a whole, while the collecting and keeping of crickets for their song was perhaps an expression of a certain intellectual inquisitiveness fostered by the circumstances of nature.

Obviously the sheer volume and profusion of the unseen cricket ensembles which gather on summer evenings and in the fall in particular was something they could hardly ignore. The strangely restful clicks, whirrs, buzzes and miniature bell-like ringings filling the air confirm that the heat is subsiding and that more restful times are at hand. Even now such sounds remind the Japanese that the seasons are changing, making them reflective and sentimental.

During the Edo period (1600-1868), crickets were 'farmed' and insect hawkers supplied tuneful bugs to customers who were perhaps reluctant to venture into the wild to find their own household

songsters.

Much more recently, the journalist and revered commentator on things Japanese, Lafcadio Hearn, was quick to notice that it was only the Japanese and ancient Greeks who had a real love of insects.

But whatever the passion for crickets, there was always a need to carry or keep them in something. A cage was the obvious answer, and bamboo was the ideal material.

Because of its fibrous structure, bamboo can be easily split following the line of the culm and then pared down to make thin narrow strips, from which to weave baskets. With a great deal more effort, fine round splints can be fashioned, and these make ideal bars, not only for insect cages but for bird

cages, too.

Suruga basketry makes use of these splints to produce a multitude of items that first gained recognition in the West at the 1873 World's Fair in Vienna. The craft became established long before that,



Finely crafted accommodation for a friendly cricket



Botan no Ma—one of the fine guest rooms of Hyosekikaku

when samurai in the area around Shimizu, some one hundred kilometers southwest of Tokyo, took up basket making to supplement their incomes. They skilfully fashioned cages and confectionery containers to sell to the travellers who passed back and forth along the Tokaido route between Edo—now Tokyo—and Kyoto. But, despite the decline in keeping crickets as direct reminders of a walk in the fields or forests, or simply as a barometer of the seasons, the Suruga insect and bird cages are the pinnacle of this craft.

The tree covered slopes of the mountains in Hakone, on the other hand, provide the right kind of

environment to hear such things as the long-horned grasshopper, the camel cricket and other chorusing crickets in the wild. And Hyosekikaku, a traditional inn surrounded by very extensive wooded grounds



A sample of Hyosekikaku's culinary delights

Hakone can be most easily reached by the Odakyu Line from Shinjuku. Use the mountain railway to Gora and then a taxi to Hyosekikaku. Prices begin at about ¥25,000 per person for one night with two meals. There are reductions for more than two people. Call 0460-4-8531 for reservations and details. Suruga basketry can be found at some department stores, or at the Japan Traditional Craft Center, Minami Aoyama, Tokyo. Tel: 03-3403-2460.



offers delightful accommodation from which to pursue such simple pleasures.

It was built as a house and guest facility in 1917 for a Tokyo dye wholesaler, and originally stood in Omori, then a suburb of Tokyo.

But after it sustained some damage in the 1912 Great Kanto Earthquake, it was bought by the builder who constructed it, dismantled and moved to its present site. Now this period building of great charm provides guests with a sanc-

tuary from which to commune with nature, even its hopping clicking musicians.



In cooperation with the
JAPAN TRADITIONAL
CRAFT CENTER

T A B L E T A L K

French Restaurant MANOIR D'INNO



Mrs. Inoue, owner's wife

Being one of the most developed countries in the world, modern Japan is inundated with goods of all description. This is also true on the eating front too, the streets fairly bristling with restaurants and the shelves in book stores bursting at the seams with publications introducing and appraising various restaurants. However, it is absolutely astonishing how some of the authors, who up until a short while ago had been introducing sushi, soba and ramen restaurants, are now critically appraising French cuisine and wine. What is more, one cannot help be appalled at the way in which they are frantically classifying French restaurants through out Japan to the point of affectedly awarding one, two or three stars in the Michelin manner.

No doubt these 'would be' authorities on the subject would include such restaurants as *Apicius*, *Lecrin* or *Maxim's de Paris* in their list of three star French restaurants in Tokyo. I, too, am of the opinion that these restaurants are by no means unworthy of some acclaim but I am opposed to putting them in the three star category. This is because I believe that the surroundings of a high class restaurant are extremely important and there should be windows overlooking a garden for the enjoyment of patrons, since it is not a place for playing roulette. As all

three of these restaurants are situated in the basement of buildings, none of them fulfills these vital criteria. In that sense, I would say that my ideal restaurant is one like *Pescatore*, which is situated on the top of a small hill surrounded by trees on the north west outskirts of Rome.

However, the *MANOIR D'INNO* in a quiet backwater of Aoyama, is a French restaurant that can be truly proud of its atmosphere as well as its reasonably priced cuisine. It was opened two years ago by Inoue Asahi who has been a major force in the world of French cookery in Japan since joining the staff of *Chez Inno* in Kyobashi 12 years before. The building had until recently been used as a guest house by the top American firm *Caltex*. Three magnificent 80 year old camphor trees tower above the 350 sq.m. or so of lawns and garden. With a floor area of 700 sq.m., the restaurant itself together with the sun lounge and private rooms can seat up to 100 guests.

The restaurant's forte lies in the manner in which it utilizes the superb grounds for different functions ranging from wedding ceremonies and receptions to parties. A very popular venue amongst those who know it, the restaurant is constantly taking bookings.

Mr. Inoue is extremely enthusiastic and ambitious about French food, his motto being "Tradition and Creativity." He is also very good at dealing with the younger generation and as a result many of the youngsters, who have at some point been under his wing, are now working around the country as chief chefs creat-

ing French dishes with originality. However, Mr. Inoue's sauces are still in my opinion the best in Japan.

Here is a selection from the menu for reference.

Oeuf Brouillé aux Oursins
(Scrambled eggs and sea urchin)
Salade de Langoustine aux Truffes
(Lobster salad with truffles)
Flan de celeri-rave au Foie Gras
(Céleriace flan with foie gras)
The meat dishes: Carré d'agneau sisteron (Veal), Ris de Veau (Breast of veal), Filet Mignon (Fillet Steak)
The fish dishes: *Ainame* (Greeling), *Madai* (Sea Bream), Poisson du Jour (Fish of the day)

Three course dinner costs from between ¥8,000 to ¥15,000. Lunch starts at ¥3,800. There is a choice of 350 kinds of wine from the 8,000 bottles in the cellar. These vary in price but they cost in the region of around ¥10,000 to ¥15,000 per bottle.

MANOIR D'INNO

4-1-13 Shibuya, Shibuya-ku, Tokyo

Tel: 03-3406-0200

Hours: Lunch—11:30 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.

Dinner—6:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m.

Closed: Mondays

Hori Yoshimichi

President, *Fukui Oil Storage Co., Ltd.*

