

# T A B L E T A L K

## Austral — with Wine and Sommelier



In the past, sommeliers were only found in the best restaurants in Japan and they rarely appeared on television or in magazines. For those who were only vaguely aware of the existence of wine waiters, it was therefore a daunting experience to be confronted by an imposing figure armed with a luxurious leather-bound wine list. For this reason, uninitiated customers were often unable to convey what they wanted and invariably resorted to leaving the choice of wine up to the sommelier. They were then left wondering whether or not they had simply been recommended a really expensive wine and if they would really like it or not. Many people, in fact, were reluctant to eat, out despite their desire for good food, simply because they feared the irksome ritual of choosing a wine.

The situation is now very different, partly thanks to the work of a gifted sommelier called Tazaki Shinya, who has succeeded in making the profession more widely known to the public at large. It seems that Mr Tazaki has had a great influence on those who are following in his footsteps and young wine waiters can now be seen going about their work in a lively man-

ner in the better restaurants. This may have something to do with the fact that the number of people who know their wines has grown and patrons no longer feel coerced by a wine waiter.

At *Austral* on Ginza's Namiki-dori street, all the serving staff are qualified sommeliers. This may be the reason why it is possible to enjoy a wine with character there even when it is sold by the glass — something that would be almost unimaginable elsewhere. What is more, without being prejudiced against French wine, the sommeliers recommend a suitable wine to go with a customer's choice of menu such as a dry Italian wine with a simple fish dish or a medium-sweet German wine with an antipasto of foie gras.

The name *Austral* actually means "southern" and despite having the kind of tableware and furniture we would normally associate with a well-to-do restaurant, the general impression is much more informal as the name implies. This may possibly be due to the high ceiling and the brightly lit interior despite the fact the restaurant occupies a basement. It also undoubtedly has something to do with the good-natured waiters and the way in which they take everything in their stride. The food is of course superb. Each dish comes in half portions, too, so it is possible to savor a selection of these at dinner, when food is served a la carte.

The service is exceptional, and when I dined there last, I was sent on my way by the lady of the house telling me to wrap up warm against the cold.

These personal touches allow customers to relax and enjoy a congenial evening, making it an ideal place for a family celebration.

Recommendations from the menu are a mosaic of fresh farm vegetables, sautéed mushrooms with prawns wrapped in crispy potato, and a poele of foie gras with white kidney beans soured in vinegar, the sharpness of the vinegar softened with honey.

### *Austral*

Carioca Bldg. B1F, 5-4-8 Ginza, Chuo-ku, Tokyo

Tel: 03-3572-0548

Hours: Lunch — 11:30 a.m. to 2:00

p.m. (last order)

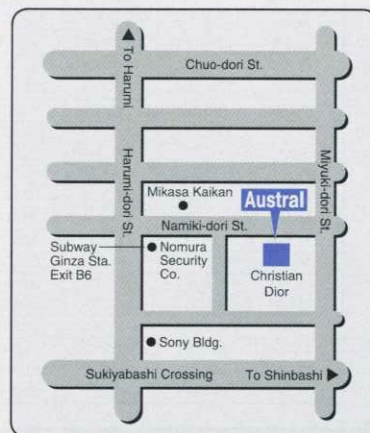
Dinner — 5:30 p.m. to 9:00

p.m. (last order)

Closed: Sundays and the second Monday of each month

### *Hori Yoshimichi*

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



# O U T I N G

## Kyushu Discoveries

Story by *Bill Tingey*

At the end of the 1980s, the focus of archeological attention in Japan was on Yoshinogari in the northwestern corner of Kyushu. Finds here span a 12,000 year period up to medieval times. But the discovery of a double-

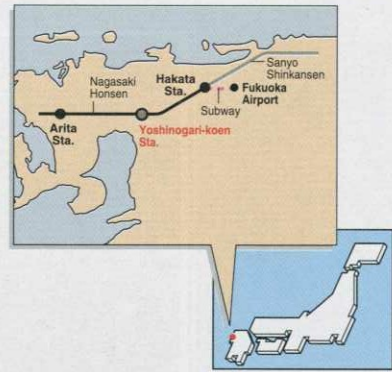
moated settlement of the Yayoi period (ca. B.C. 300 to about A.D. 300) spurred many people to speculate that it might have been from here that the legendary Queen Himiko ruled Yamatai. Although verification of her

presence at Yoshinogari is illusive, according to the third-century Chinese chronicle *Wei Zhi*, Yamatai was an alliance of thirty small states and the largest of some one hundred existing in the land of Wa.

The thrill and romance of such conjecture apart, what has actually been found at Yoshinogari is truly significant and is enabling scholars to piece together a more complete



Go to Fukuoka in Kyushu by air or by Shinkansen and take the Nagasaki mainline. For Yoshinogari get off at Yoshinogari-Koen. Except for major national holidays, the site is open everyday from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Arita is further west. The Arita China Market is held between April 29th and May 5th. For further information on places to visit in Arita go to the Tourist Information Center in Arita station, Tel: 0955-42-4052. Arita ware can be purchased at better department stores or at the Japan Traditional Craft Center, Minami Aoyama, Tokyo (Tel: 03-3403-2460). Other Japanese crafts can be found at <http://www.wnn.or.jp/wnn-craft/eng/index.html>. For tourist information contact the Japan National Tourist Office in English (Tel: 03-3201-3331), or access <http://www.jnto.go.jp>



picture of life in those times.

A number of the relics, for example, make it clear that there was a good deal of contact between the Asian continent and this western outpost of a nation that still had to be formed. A Korean-made bronze dagger found on the site and some glass beads from China are simple proof of links with the mainland. The shell bracelets found in burial jars, however, have imparted much more to enthral. The shells themselves are of a species only to be found south of Amami Ohshima, some 400 kilometers southwest of Kyushu. However, fabric remnants attached to one of these bracelets further indicated that there were strong cultural and trading links with those over the water. Looking like patches of rust, the woven structure of the fabric is clearly visible through a microscope. Expert analysis of the section of the fiber revealed that it was silk and most likely produced in China.

But what color was it originally? Researchers of dyes in history and archeology, Dr. Shimoyama and his colleague Noda Yasuko were able to "finger print" not only the fiber but also the dyestuff by using their own technique of non-destructive three-dimensional fluorescence spectrometry. They confirmed that the fiber was indeed silk and were also able to ascertain that the dye was derived from the hypobranchial gland of a mollusc, which produced a Tyrian purple — the purple of the ancients.

It seems likely that the wearer of these bracelets would have been spared the drudgery of physical work. It must be supposed, therefore, that they were from the elite stratum of society and that the bracelets were symbols of social rank and role.

Over 28 shell bracelets were found in seven of more than 2,000 jar burials unearthed at Yoshinogari. In many cases, a large jar was capped by a smaller one to form a capsule-like coffin, the whole arrangement being set more or less horizontally in the ground. Although these jars have an elegance all of their own, they were simply made and fired at a low temperature. And yet many were found virtually intact some 2,000 years after they were consigned to the earth.

The kind of ceramics to be found further west at Arita, on the other hand, are a highly developed form of the potters craft. But Arita ware, too, is indebted to foreign guidance and example. During the seventeenth century a Korean discovered the kaolin clay necessary for making porcelain near Arita, and then a Japanese potter perfected polychrome overglaze enamel techniques that he had learned



There are many quality bargains at the annual china market in Arita (Photo: Arita Chamber of Commerce & Industry)



from studying Chinese wares. Popularly known as Imari ware, it was subsequently exported to Europe and influenced the china from Maissen, Delft, Chantilly, Worcester and Bow.

Today, you may be lucky enough to pick up a bargain at the annual Arita china market. And a visit to Yoshinogari may transport you through time and space. In whichever case, your discoveries will be many.



Photo: Bill Tingey

A jar burial at Yoshinogari reveals its secrets



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