

Creativity of Winemaking

Mayu Saito is a young winemaker in Japan. She is a manager at Kisvin Winery in Koshu, Yamanashi.
This is an interview about the creativity from the point of view of winemaking.

Winemaker Mayu Saito



Winemaker

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Born in 1980

Left Waseda University in 2003.

Graduated from California State University, Fresno

Agricultural Science and Technology Department of Viticulture and Enology in 2008.

Studied winemaking and cultivation at Fresno State Winery, Domaine Jean COLLET et fils (Chablis, France).

Domaine Benoit Cantin (Irancy, France)

and Domaine Thierry Richoux (Irancy, France).

Became manager at Kisvin Winery in 2003.

—Encounter with winemaking

◆What triggered your interest in winemaking?

It was when I harvested grapes for wine at the island of Corsica in France.

When I was studying at Waseda University, I met a wonderful French teacher Mr. Masafumi Kato, (Translator of "Mondovino by Jonathan Nossiter") He planned grape harvesting tours and took students to France.

There, I was so inspired by the joy of growing grapes, harvesting, and the process of winemaking. The vineyards' old men and women welcomed us with joy while pouring their wine into our glasses. At this time I determined that in the future I would love to do the same thing in Japan and fill everyone's glass with my wine! That was the moment I found something I really want to do.

So experiencing real winemaking was your door to the winemaking world.

That was such a special experience and a fateful encounter.

—About making wine.

◆Please tell me more about winemaking?

Harvesting grapes and making wine is the main job. To be more specific, taking care of grape trees at the vineyard is our job. This is about farming and not gardening. Harvesting grapes and making delicious wine need all kinds of knowledge such as microbiology and zymurgy based on chemistry, and above all the physical strength to get through these processes is the most necessary thing for winemaking.

All of these make delicious, safe and satisfying wine that everyone loves...well, although I tend to make the wine I personally like...As you know, sommeliers at the restaurants are basically defender of wine. Even if the wine is not appealing to their taste, recommending the wine according to customer's preference or cuisine is their job. But for winemakers, it is important to perceive even a trifling deflection in the wine. Keeping and raising the quality of wine and bottling is our job.



撮影：岸本咲子 (<http://sakikokishimoto.info>)

—Wine making is based on agriculture.

◆Please tell me the process of winemaking

Wine is made of grapes. We first plant grapes in a vineyard, picking grapes and pressing... Nowadays most of the processes are done by machines and then yeast and bacterium ferments wine. Fresh wine is cloudy but it will gradually get clear, and then age the upper layer of the juice and bottle it. This is the brief process of winemaking. Well the process sounds simple but of course everything is not as easy as you think. By the way, we first squeeze the grapes and then ferment them to make white wine. To make red wine we squeeze them after the fermenting process with skin, grapes seeds and juice. This is why red wine is the color of the skin of the grapes.

I found so many kinds of grapes in your vineyard. It is also very interesting to learn the difference between the fermenting process of red wine and white wine. I didn't know the reason why white wine has a more pleasant taste than heavy red wine was because of making process.

—Communicating with nature

◆Compared to Interior design or product design, the material of winemaking is agriculture which is nature. Since the main material comes from nature, I think it is sometimes difficult to control them.

How do you communicate with nature?

Well, in the first place agriculture is not equal to nature. Sometimes people say, "Vineyards are beautiful natural landscapes!" , but cultivating field and planting trees is already not the working of nature, it is agriculture done by humans. So from this point of view farming itself is designing. We are always thinking of growing grapes in the way we want such as fragrance, taste, color, sugar content, acids, size and thickness of the skin. And our goal is to create workers friendly vineyard and winemaking

method system for the next generation. Agriculture includes ideas and thoughts of many people. So in a way, I think you can call Kesvin a design team. Bottling and selling good wine could be completed in one generation. But improving vineyard is a long way process and I don't think it will be completed by our generation. So I think it is important to create systems to pass onto the next generation. It is easy to outsource this operation to somewhere else, but at Kisvin we grow our grapes by ourselves. I think quality control of the wine can be mostly done at the vineyard.

I see! Creating vineyard is already designing! From that point of view, Kisvin winery is a splendid group of creators who are thinking about next generation and creating vineyard for them. And I feel craftsmanship from creating materials by yourself.

◆When do you feel satisfied?

When someone I love says " It's delicious!" When I find Kisvin's name on the wine list of restaurants and bars that I wished they have our wine. When Kisvin wine itself makes the atmosphere wonderful or when I see our bottle is in the place where adds value to Kisvin wine itself.

That's right, sometimes just a bottle of wine makes the atmosphere brilliant and cheerful. In a way wine is not just an alcohol, it is something special for everyone.



撮影：岸本咲子 (<http://sakikokishimoto.info>)



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—About Kisvin Winery

◆ Please tell me more about Kisvin Winery, how are the co-workers and working environment?

Kisvin winery was established in 2013 at Enzan Koshu-shi Yamanashi, Japan.

The president is Yasuhiro Ogihara who is the third generation of the vineyard. Before 2013 he was mainly making grapes for eating purposes and was selling grapes to the local winery. When he had enough vineyard and grapes for his own winemaking, he built a brand-new winery in his backyard. Our motto is very simple that first we grow our own grapes in our own vineyard, and then we think we can make our own wines.

Now we grow chardonnay grapes, koshu grapes, pinot noir grapes, syrah grapes and zinfandel grapes. We are very small winery and just making about 10,000 bottles a year. The president Ogihara grew up as a son of vineyard but he has a unique career as a motocross racer and bass fishing pro.

In addition he graduated from the college of Agriculture and veterinary Medicine at Nihon University. He creates grapes from a scientific point of view and he has a strong will to grow the best grapes than anyone else. He also has a strong observing power for the vineyard.

Winery Owner
Yasuhiro Ogihara



Born in 1960, Yamanashi Japan.
 Born as a third generation of a grape making family.
 Graduated from Nihon University College of Bio resource Sciences
 In 2001 he decided to make only grapes for wine.
 In 2005 started the winemaking study group Team Kisvin with Kazuhiro Nishioka (Tokyo University) and Hitoshi Ikegawa (Ikegawa General Vineyard)
 Established Agricultural production corporation Kisvin in 2009.
 Established Kisvin Winery in 2013.

When I was in California he came to recruit me and asked me to come to see his vineyard in Yamanashi. So I went to see the vineyard when I came back to Japan. At that time I thought that it is still a young vineyard and has a lot to improve but the grapes he made were so powerful that I felt I will be able to make delicious wine with him. Now we have 5 people working together some are locals and some are from other places. I am the chief but I am the youngest in our team. I am working everyday thinking about how to manage our winery, raising the quality of our wine and constructing the brand image.

To be honest, I just have been working very hard for the past 4 years since the establishment of the winery. In the years to come we will need more efforts on human resources development for the next generation. I hope Kisvin to continue developing not only the vineyard but also our company organization.

◆What is your goal at Kisvin?

I would like to become a pronoun of wine. I love wine so much that sometimes I even want to become wine itself... I hope everyone knows the name of Kisvin, even if they don't know much about wine. Also I hope Kisvin becomes the representative of Japanese wine. Speaking of Japanese wine, Koshu grape is the most famous grape in Japan. We do have Koshu grapes but we also grow chardonnay grapes, pinot noir grapes and syrah grapes which are wildly cultivated in the world famous grape production areas. And I think it is very important to cultivate world standard grapes at a global level.

So far we are still far away from that stage. At this point Japanese wines are only praised by some of Japanese wine lovers. We still need to make lots of effort to get closer to the world level of cultivation and winemaking until the time comes when someone outside of Japan will be impressed by our wine. I think that is the time when our efforts will bloom in the world.



撮影：岸本咲子 (<http://sakikokishimoto.info>)

— After the interview

The phrase she said "I love wine so much that sometimes I even want to become wine itself" left a strong impression of her passion to wine. After training in US and France her way of winemaking naturally became at the same level with her teachers and fellows all over the world, and her goal in winemaking is to become the best in the world. She is now at the stage of growing wellknown grapes at world standard level.

The atmosphere of Kisvin winery was so clean and nothing wasted that almost represents Mayu herself.

As Mayu said "Delicious grapes make delicious wine." She is improving the vineyard everyday to harvest the most delicious grapes. She always sets a high goal so she is always concentrating on what she has to do in front of her. It was so clear to see that she was making the maximum efforts with what she has to send out the best wine to the world. I really hope you also felt the power of Kisvin winery from this interview. I am looking forward to the success of Kisvin wine which is filled with creativity and craftsmanship in the world.

Thank you so much to Kisvin Winery for wonderful time!



Interviewer : Yukiyo Izuta (Interior Designer)

After experienced some ogf large scale commercial interior design projects in Japan, she moved to Taiwan in 2010 and joined some local projects.

From 2014 she joined Garde co., ltd Tokyo office as a local architect.

Some of her projects are: BOUCHERON boutique in Ginza, Melvita and Pomellato shops.