

SAKÉ PASSION & CIE

Jikon / Kiyashow Shuzo

—Nature, History, and Culture of Nabari, Mie—

1． History

Over 200 years of history in the old post town of　Nabari.
A brewery restored to prominence by a gifted Toji.

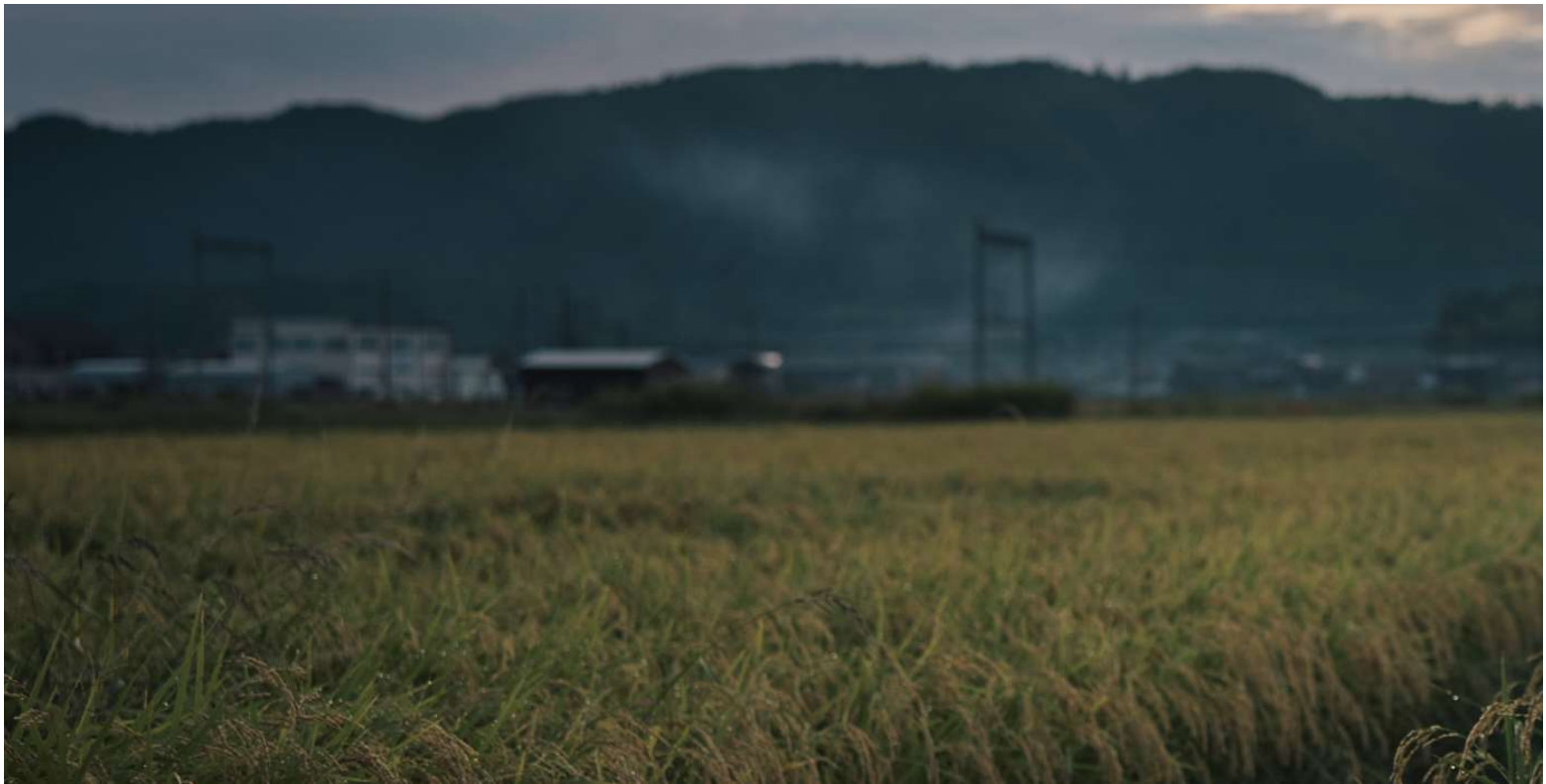


In Nabari, Mie Prefecture, the old streets of the Hase Kaido still retain the atmosphere of a historic post town. Along one of these streets stands Kiyashow Shuzo, a brewery founded in 1818 by the Onishi family, who were originally timber merchants. For more than two centuries, the brewery produced sake under the name Takasago, a reference to the “Nogaku[1]”. The connection was especially fitting in Nabari, a region long associated with the early history of Nogaku through Kan’ami, who is said to have established one of the earliest Nogaku stages in the area. A major turning point came in 2003, when sixth-generation owner Tadayoshi Onishi returned to the brewery after completing his training. At a time when many small regional breweries were struggling to survive, he chose to oversee the brewing himself rather than depending on an outside “toji”.

The very first sake he brewed in that role was Jikon.

When Jikon was released in 2004, it immediately received a gold medal at the National New Sake Awards and has since become one of Japan’s most sought-after sake labels.

Nogaku[1]: the principal form of Japanese performing art as well as Kabuki.



SAKÉ PASSION Exclusive Brand

而今 きもと 純米大吟醸 “宇奈根”

Jikon Kimoto Junmai Daiginjo “Unane”



To celebrate the 20th anniversary of the now legendary Jikon, this special sake—“Jikon Unane”—was brewed.

While Jikon’s finest grades releases have long used Yamada Nishiki and Omachi from other regions, this “Jikon Unane” pursues to brew the highest quality sake using local sake rice from Nabari—a region with a tradition of being a premier rice-producing area in ancient times.

Unane is crafted from “Mie Yamada Nishiki”, grown exclusively in “Mihata美旗 region” with local farmers.
The name “Mihata美旗” comes from one of the most famous historical figure from Asuka era(7th century) “Prince Shotoku”. He set out from Asuka in search of land that grows the finest rice, said to have discovered the “Beautiful=美” fields of Nabari and planted his “Flag=旗” there.

Unlike most Jikon sake, this expression is brewed using the traditional ‘Kimoto method’. It is released in extremely limited quantity—a single tank per year.

“Unane” is named after Unane-no-Mikoto, the guardian of water and rice enshrined at Urufushine Shrine in Nabari—a leading shrine among the 26 Moto-Ise shrines*.
This reflects Jikon’s deep ties to Nabari and marks a new challenge for the brewery.

*Moto-Ise shrines refers to several shrines across Japan where the supreme God of Shinto Amaterasu-Omikami (goddess of the Sun) was formerly enshrined before Ise grand Shine was permanently established.

Launching in spring 2026







2． People and Philosophy

Tadayoshi Onishi,
Sixth-Generation Owner of Kiyashow Brewery



After graduating from the Faculty of Science and Technology at Sophia University, Tadayoshi worked as an engineer at a major manufacturer before returning to his family brewery in 2002, when the business was close to shutting down. He spent the next two years training under the Tajima toji and first took charge of brewing in 2004.
The name “Jikon而今” was given by his mother, who had long supported and protected the Onishi family brewery, for the new sake he set out to make. Tadayoshi is known for a rigorous approach to brewing, while maintaining a close relationship with the brewery team working alongside him.

The Philosophy Behind the Name “Jikon 而今”



“Jikon” is a Buddhist term associated with the Zen monk “Dogen” in the early Kamakura period (1185-1333), referring to the idea of living fully in the present moment. The name reflects Tadayoshi’s approach to sake brewing: focusing completely on the work in front of him and giving his full attention to each moment of the process. Even today, as Jikon has become increasingly difficult to obtain around the world, Tadayoshi continues to lead brewing himself each day at the brewery, without compromising on the standards behind the sake.

A Team of Brewers united by Craft and Pride



Rather than the traditional structure of a brewery owner working separately from toji and brewery seasonal workers, Jikon is built around as one team led by Tadayoshi himself as brewer. The younger brewers are employed full-time, and each takes part in the process with a strong sense of responsibility toward the sake they make. Sake of this kind cannot be created by one person alone. The precision and balance of Jikon depend on consistency and care throughout every stage of brewing.
It’s the kind of ideal team that captures your heart the moment you meet them. That’s precisely why Jikon’s distinctive character was brought to life.

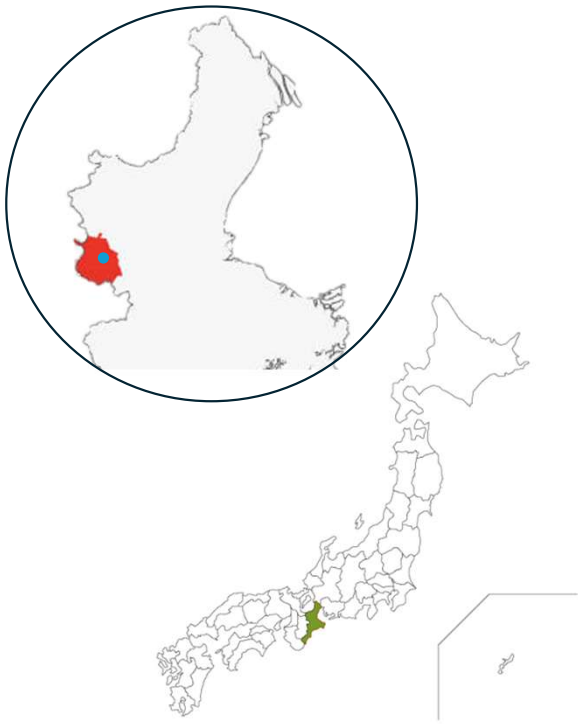
3． Nature・History・Culture of Nabari, Mie

A historic town embraced by mountains and rivers

Nabari is surrounded by remarkable natural scenery, from the rolling grasslands of Soni Highlands and the dramatic cliffs of Kaochi Valley to the quiet waters of Shorenji Lake. The Nabari River flows through the region, carrying clear water that later becomes part of the Yodo river system, part of which flows into Osaka, and Uji river system, which flows into Kyoto, while fertile clay soil formed by the ancient Lake Biwa basin has long made the area well suited to agriculture. Among Nabari's most respected rice-growing districts is "Mihata", whose name is said to originate from a legend in which Prince Shotoku planted a banner after discovering fertile land there. Abundant water, rich soil, and the surrounding mountains supported agriculture here from early times and helped shape the character of the region.

Over the centuries, this natural environment also fostered a deep cultural tradition. Nabari became associated with Nogaku culture through Kan'ami and later prospered during the Edo period as both a castle town of the Todo family and a post town along the road to Ise Shrine.

Kiyashow Shuzo still stands along the old Hase Kaido, where quiet streets and historical buildings continue to preserve the atmosphere of the old town.







‘Urutofune Shrine’ ‘Unane-no-Mikoto’, the principal shrine of Nabari and its deity.

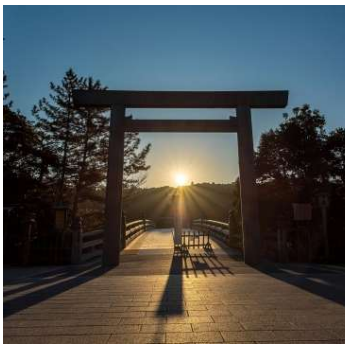


<Ancient shrine, mentioned in Shinto mythology. >

Near Kiyashow Shuzo, where the Uda and Nabari rivers meet, stands Urufushine Shrine, long regarded as one of the historic guardian shrines of the region. The shrine is counted among the “Moto-Ise” sites connected to Princess Yamatohime’s search for a place to enshrine Shinto’s Supreme God Amaterasu, and tradition holds that she remained here for two years. Its name, “Urufushine,” is said to refer to the abundant underground water that has long nourished the surrounding land. Enshrined here is Unane-no-Mikoto, a deity associated with grain and water — elements that have shaped life and agriculture in Nabari since ancient times.



Goddess Amaterasu　Yamato Hime



Place of origin for Japan’s oldest classical theatrical tradition

Kan’ami, the figure credited with shaping Nogaku into a refined theatrical art, is deeply connected to Nabari. It was here that he established one of Japan’s earliest performance art, “Sarugaku” troupes, which is based of “Nogaku” flourishing later in Kyoto under the patronage of shogun Ashikaga Yoshimitsu. That connection to Nogaku culture can still be found in Kiyashow Shuzo today. The brewery’s long-standing label “Takasago,” for example, takes its name from the classical Nogaku play.

During the Edo period, Kiyashow Shuzo also operated a small temple school known as “Eijudo” on the brewery grounds. It served not only as one of the earliest places of learning in the area, but also as a place where music, dance, and other performing arts connected to local Nogaku traditions were passed down to younger generations.



Mie・Nabari　Terroir

1．Nabari's Terroir ～Land, Climate, Water～

Located at an elevation of around 220m and surrounded by largely undeveloped mountains, Nabari has long been blessed with a rich natural environment. The clear waters of the Nabari River flow through the basin before joining the A-class rivers, Uji River in Kyoto and the Yodo River in Osaka.

These conditions have made Nabari exceptionally well suited to rice cultivation. Among its many rice-growing districts, "Mihata" is said to have stood out for the quality of its fields — a fact that remains little known today.

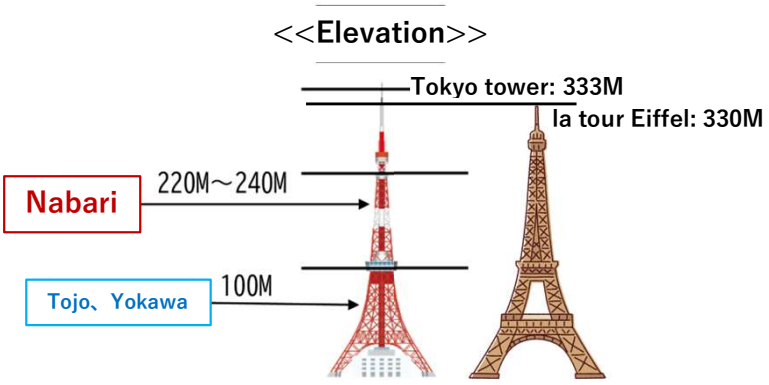
The name Mihata is said to originate from a legend in which Prince Shotoku, upon discovering these fertile fields, planted a flag there.

The area's elevation and surrounding mountains create the wide differences between daytime and nighttime temperatures that are essential for agriculture. Nabari also lies further south than Yokawa and Tojo in Hyogo — regions widely known for premium sake rice — while still benefiting from ample sunlight.

The region was once part of the ancient Lake Biwa basin, leaving behind nutrient-rich clay soil well suited to rice cultivation.
Taken together, Nabari possesses many of the same natural conditions found in Hyogo's famed Special A districts for sake rice.

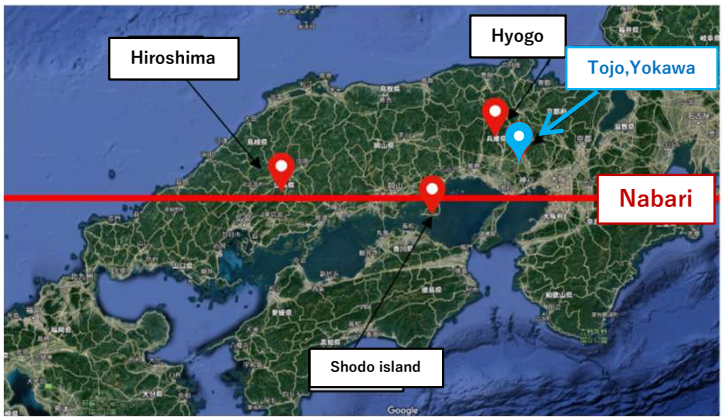
Elevated land that creates temperature differences between daytime and nighttime

Southern Nabari lies in a basin surrounded by mountains formed through intense volcanic activity around 15 million years ago. Situated at an elevation of over 200m — compared with around 100m in Yoshikawa, Hyogo — the area experiences significant temperature differences between day and night. These conditions are well suited not only to sake brewing, but also to the cultivation of high-quality rice.



Abundant sunlight and temperature variation created by the constant mountain winds

Nabari lies further south than the well-known Tojo and Yokawa districts of Hyogo Prefecture, enjoying levels of sunlight comparable to those of the Seto Inland Sea region. Great sake rice varieties such as Yamadanishiki and Omachi — often classified as late-ripening variety— require abundant sunlight and grow to considerable height.
Surrounded by mountains and exposed to constant descending winds, Nabari combines rich sunlight with significant day-to-night temperature variation, creating an environment well suited to the cultivation of premium sake rice while also helping to reduce the risk of disease and pests.



Rich soil left behind by ancient Lake Biwa

Nabari is also known as the birthplace of Lake Biwa, the largest lake in Japan and the third oldest in the world. The ancient lakebed left behind nutrient-rich clay soil, formed from organic matter accumulated over millions of years.

The fine clay particles deposited on the lakebed also provide suitable conditions for late-ripening sake rice varieties, whose tall stalks are particularly vulnerable to falling over.



(Left) Ancient lake Biwa's fluctuation
(Bottom) Mihata's nutrient-rich soil



2． Jikon’s Rice

Working with local farmers in Nabari from the rice planting stage

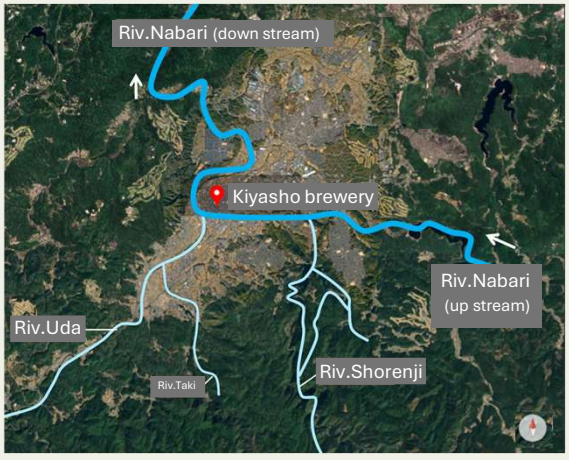
With the support of dedicated local growers in Nabari, Tadayoshi and the brewery team take part in rice cultivation from the planting stage onward. The Nabari Yamadanishiki used for “Jikon Unane” and Jikon Nabari comes from the Mihata district. The rice grown there brings depth, volume, and structure to the sake. For Jikon Mie Yamadanishiki, the rice is sourced from the Takigawa district, where cooler water and soils mixed with clay and sand produce a lighter, more refined expression.
Together with local growers, each plot is cultivated using natural farming methods.



Jikon uses not only local Yamadanishiki from Nabari, but also sake rice sourced from some of the finest growing regions for each variety across Japan. These include Hattan-Nishiki and Senbon-Nishiki from Hiroshima, Omachi from Okayama, Yamadanishiki from Hyogo (Tojo-Akitsu and Yokawa), and Sakemirai from Yamagata. Particularly notable is the use of top-grade Omachi from Okayama, available only to Jikon and Juyondai nationwide.

“Mihata美旗” ~the district for growing the best Sake rice~

The Mihata district, known for producing some of Nabari’s finest sake rice, is a quiet rural landscape dotted with numerous “kofun”-burial mounds dating from the 4th to 6th centuries. The district has long been regarded as especially fertile land, shaped by generations of agriculture and closely tied to the history of the ancient Yamato court. Once part of the ancient Lake Biwa basin, the region possesses high-quality clay soil rich in nutrients and capable of retaining both water and nourishment essential for rice cultivation. The fine clay particles deposited over time also help support the tall stalks of late-ripening sake rice varieties, making them less prone to collapse. Strong winds constantly descend from the surrounding mountains — so much so that wind turbines line the ridges above the fields. Together with the district’s significant day-to-night temperature variation, these conditions promote starch accumulation while helping to reduce disease and insect damage. Abundant sunlight, the cool climate of its 220m elevation, and the exceptionally pure water flowing from the upper reaches of the Kansai area’s river system all contribute to an environment for rice cultivation comparable to Hyogo’s famed Special A districts. Jikon’s ambition is to create sake of the highest-level using rice grown in its home region of Nabari.
The Yamadanishiki cultivated in Mihata offers the potential to make that possible.





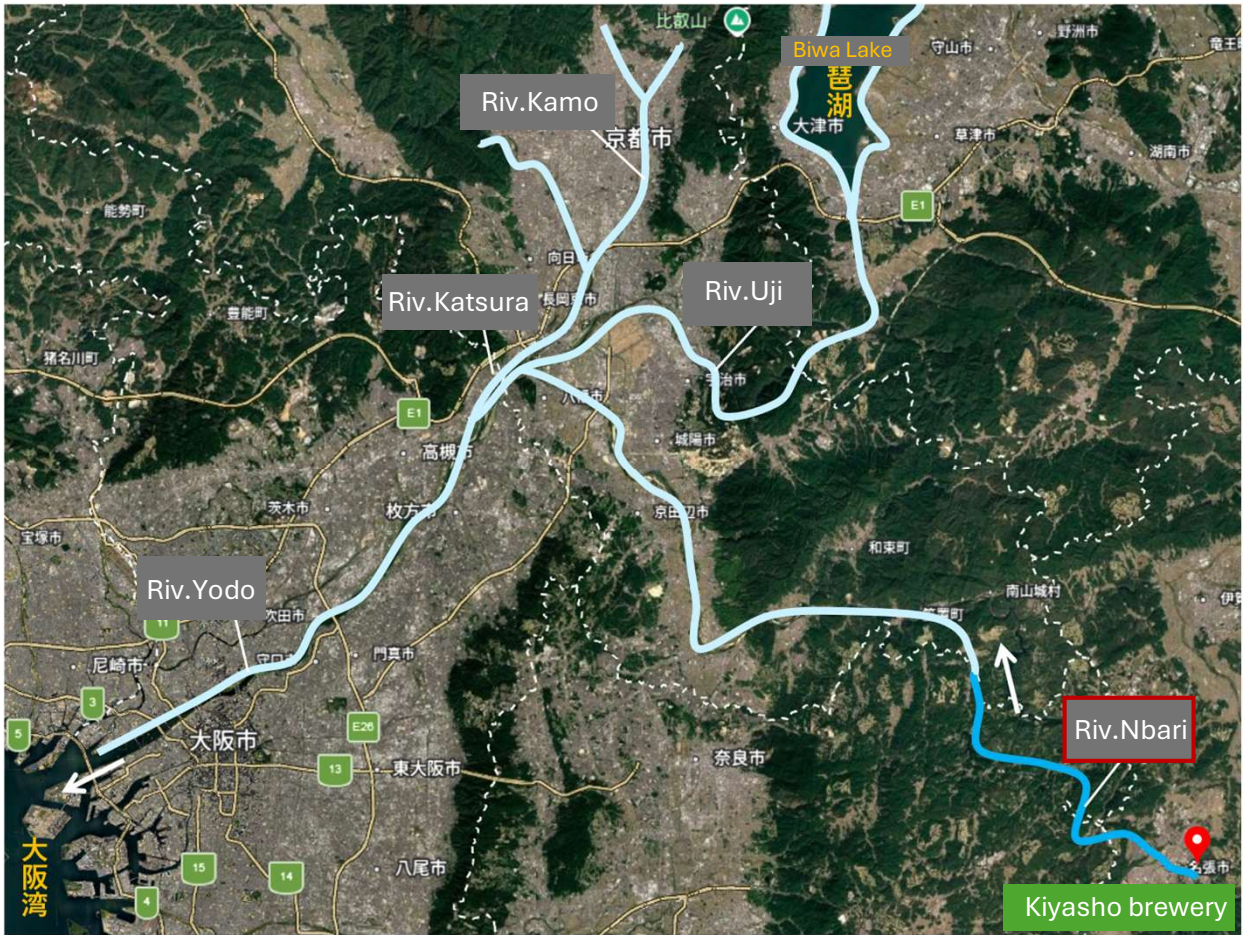
3． Water of Jikon Unane

~Mineral-rich Water from the most Upstream~

Water defines the Nabari Basin. Fed by the Nabari, Shorenji, and Uda rivers, the area sits at the uppermost reaches of the Kansai river system, with the Nabari River eventually flowing north into the Uji River in Kyoto before becoming part of the Yodo River that reaches Osaka Bay. Almost no human activity exists in the mountains upstream, allowing clear water to flow down into the basin. Over time, rainwater passes through volcanic rock formed by massive eruptions that once covered the Kii Peninsula, as well as through ancient seabed layers and granite formations dating back to the late Mesozoic to early Paleogene era (the age of the dinosaurs). By the time the water reaches the flatlands of Nabari, it has been naturally filtered through these mineral-rich geological layers, resulting in remarkably clear, pure water with very low organic content. This water has long been one of the defining elements of the region's rice cultivation and sake brewing.



Kaochidani Granite Formations



Unique Calcium-rich Brewing Water

Jikon uses unusually calcium-rich water for Japan, with calcium levels nearly seven times higher than magnesium. The water comes from the geology of the Nabari Basin, where volcanic mineral layers, marine-derived rock, and traces of limestone left behind by ancient Lake Biwa shape its mineral balance.

Calcium-rich water is often associated with regions such as Burgundy and Champagne. In sake, it brings clarity and structure while maintaining softness through the finish.

Jikon's Brewing Water

Calcium(Ca):	14 mg/L
Magnesium(Mg):	2.8 mg/L
Water hardness(Ca+Mg):	46 mg/L



To protect the forest is to protect the beautiful water

The Onishi family, founders of Jikon, originally ran a timber business known as Kiyashow-Shoten. That connection to the forest continues today through the management and preservation of woodland alongside sake brewing. The family maintains around 5 hectares of forest carrying out reforestation and thinning as part of its long-term care of the land. Good rice depends on clean water, and good sake depends on the same water. Healthy forests, in turn, are what sustain that water.

In recent years, mountain areas altered by development have become increasingly vulnerable to flash floods and landslides, causing serious damage to downstream communities and farmland. Forests and rice fields together play an important role in retaining water and supporting the region's environment.

The Onishi family continues to preserve both the name Kiyashow, and the forest known as Onishi-yama (meaning mountain of Onishi), carrying forward the roots of the family's timber business to this day.







Jikon Unane's Brewing

Preparatory Stages (polish / wash / soak / steam)





Rice polishing is entrusted to a trusted local specialist.
For washing and soaking, the new facility "Kajimachi Brewery" completed in 2025 introduced one of only around thirty advanced systems of its kind in Japan, capable of removing even the finest traces of rice bran while controlling water absorption with precision down to 0.1%. For the koji rice that defines the character of Jikon, however, the process remains entirely manual. Working in small batches of just 10 kilograms, the rice is carefully hand-washed and individually weighed throughout soaking, with water absorption adjusted in increments as small as 0.1%.

Temperature, humidity, atmospheric pressure, and the condition of the rice are all taken into account, with final adjustments guided not only by measurement, but also by the brewer's own senses and experience.

Koji Making





Much of what defines Jikon lies in its meticulous koji-making, including every stage leading up to it.
One of the key elements is the careful control of the heat generated during fermentation as the koji mold develops into "tsuki-haze" style(the mould extend deep into the rice rather than just on its surface). As the koji produces heat naturally, temperatures between 36–40℃ — where proteins break down into amino acids — are passed through as quickly and gently as possible, while the rice is slowly guided through the 40–45℃ range where starch is converted into sugar, with particular care taken to maintain temperatures around 40–42℃. Temperature and humidity control form the foundation of the process, but numbers alone do not determine the result. The condition of the rice each year, the balance of starch and protein, the texture of the koji rice, and the visible growth of the mold are all judged by hand and eye, with constant fine adjustments made through the brewer's own senses and experience.
This craftsmanship remains one of the defining elements of Jikon's character.



Moto (yeast starter) Preparation

Most Jikon sake is made using “Sokujo-moto”, that allows for a cleaner microbial environment and greater control over oxidation. For Jikon, the method is not used for speed or efficiency, but to achieve a style defined by clarity, delicacy, and precision. Sokujo is often associated with large-scale brewing because it reduces the risk of spoilage while allowing faster production. At Jikon, however, the same method is used toward an entirely different goal: preserving transparency and detail in the final sake. Kimoto brewing presents a different challenge altogether.

While kimoto naturally brings greater acidity and complexity, it can also introduce heaviness, roughness, or grain-driven flavors that stand apart from Jikon’s characteristic style.

For this reason, only a small number of kimoto tanks are produced each year under the Jikon name. The aim is not to make a powerful or expressive kimoto sake, but to retain Jikon’s clarity and precision while drawing out only the beauty and depth unique to kimoto.

When successful, Tadayoshi describes the result as “Gokumi” — something that goes beyond taste itself:

“a shimmering finish that lingers deep in the throat, carrying the vitality of countless microorganisms at work.”



For the Final Touch

Jikon uses a Yabuta press installed in a low-temperature room to preserve freshness and delicacy during pressing.

All sake is pasteurized in bottle to avoid heat damage and maintain stability after bottling.

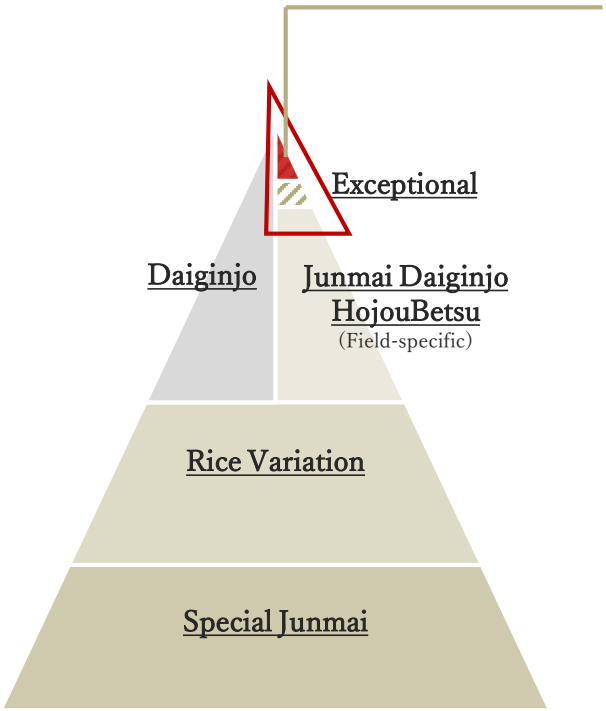
As Jikon grew, Tadayoshi invested in a state-of-the-art automatic pasteurizer — a machine that cost as much as several luxury cars. The investment was made not only for quality, but also to reduce the physical strain of bottle pasteurization on the brewery team. In many ways, it reflects Tadayoshi’s care for the people working alongside him.





Jikon “Unane”　Portfolio

As of now, April 2026: Kimoto Junmai Daiginjo (single variety only)



Production limited to the volume of a single tank, made from Yamada Nishiki grown in the Mihata parcel. Brewed in Kimoto style.

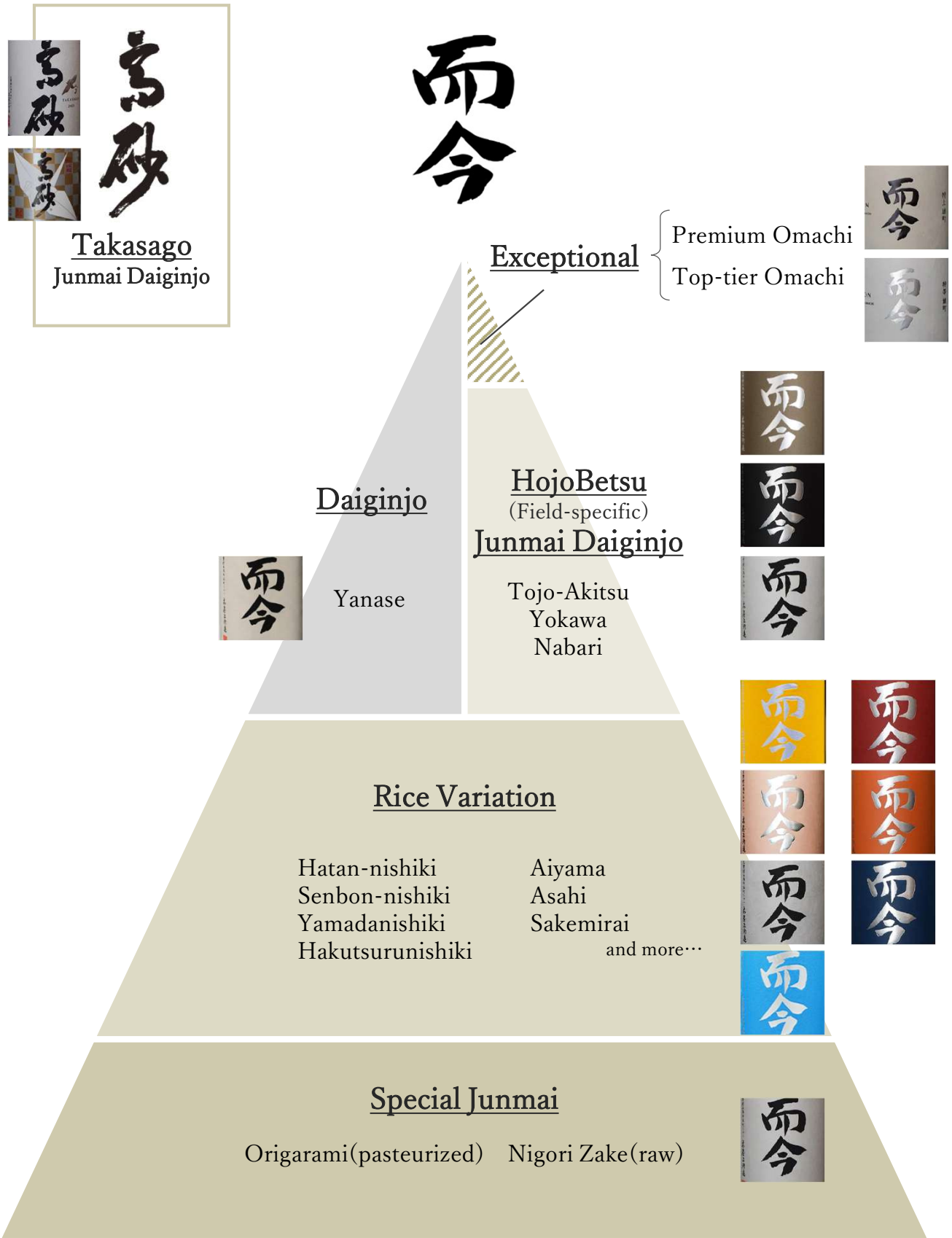






Rice:「Nabari Yamada Nishiki」100%	SMV :　- 1
Polishment rate:40%	Acidity : 1.5
Alc.15%	Amino Acid: 0.6

Jikon　General portfolio





Distributor

VIN PASSION & CIE

Minotomi bldg. 6F
3-1-1 Shibakouen Minato-ku Tokyo

Agency

SAKÉ PASSION & CIE

Minotomi bldg. 6F
3-1-1 Shibakouen Minato-ku Tokyo