

SAKE FOR THE WORLD:

THE CHALLENGE OF AN AMERICAN SAKE BREWER

A former sports trainer from the United States has plunged into the world of Japanese sake brewing. Genuinely focused on the production of this traditional beverage, he proudly shares its appeal with the rest of the world.

Brailsford says that a prime attraction of Japanese sake is its abundant flavor. His dream is to brew a batch of sake that will one day be sipped by the president of the United States.



An old-fashioned city in Japan's landlocked Gifu Prefecture, Hida is surrounded by steep mountains and covered in deep snow during the winter. Working there as a sake brewer for the Watanabe Sake Brewery, a traditional brewery of long standing, is an American man: Darryl Cody Brailsford, a former sports trainer originally from the state of Utah. Fifteen years ago, upon moving to Hida—his wife's hometown—a sip of sake from the Watanabe



Left: The label of the "Cody's Sake" series, brewed by Brailsford himself, is designed around kanji and ninja, which are popular in America. Right: With many streets lined with historical houses, the Hida area is a celebrated tourist attraction. The dignified brewing house of the Watanabe Sake Brewery is one chapter in that area's history.

Sake Brewery utterly astounded him. Lo and behold, he fell in love with the taste of the beverage. Then, mustering his courage, he asked to become an apprentice brewer at the company, and when that request was accepted in good faith, his life was changed forever.

Prepared from a mixture of rice, *koji* (malted rice), and exceptionally pure water, Japanese sake is characterized by a unique brewing process involving a highly refined approach to fermentation not seen elsewhere in the breweries of the world. Brailsford, having entered into a demanding world of craftsmanship, with plenty of strenuous labor and much specific instruction, proceeded to learn the art of brewing one step at a time. "Perfecting a marvelous batch of sake isn't just the fruit of one person's efforts, but that of a team of dedicated individuals who combine their skills. I have learned that brewing sake goes to

that depth." Currently, he has been entrusted with the important role of assistant head brewer overseeing the temperature and process of fermentation.

Brailsford's passion for Japanese sake having spread through the company, everyone at Watanabe Sake Brewery now burns with the ambition to propagate sake culture to the rest of the world. Even though awareness in his homeland of the United States has been gradually increasing, most people remain unfamiliar with sake. "Many people overseas have the misunderstanding that sake is only appropriate for Japanese cuisine," says Brailsford. "But that's not true. Sake can be enjoyed at ordinary times too—it goes equally well with pizza and barbecue." True to his word, he holds exhibits at events in other countries to spread knowledge of the brewery's products. In 2016, he began selling the "Cody's Sake"



Sake, brewed from rice, is truly a symbol of Japanese culture. Brailsford avidly reports, however, that people are free to enjoy it in a wide variety of ways.

DARRYL CODY BRAILSFORD

Originally a sports trainer from Utah in the United States, he came to Japan in 2006. He became the first American sake brewer in Japan, at the Watanabe Sake Brewery Co., Ltd., an established traditional brewery founded 150 years ago. He currently serves as assistant to the head brewer, and is also kept busy developing overseas markets for the brewery's sake products.

series of Japanese sake designed for American tastes. The series, brewed by Brailsford himself, features a fruitiness that many Americans love. The label that he designed for it also received favorable reviews, having already garnered more than 50 prizes in Japan, Europe, and the United States.

With Japanese cuisine steadily increasing in popularity worldwide, sake has come to be appreciated in all corners of the globe. More and more brewers in Japan have started to aggressively pursue the export market, and that momentum will only increase further in the future. Meanwhile, still motivated by the culture shock of his first encounter, but now a qualified brewer and fervent evangelist for Japanese sake, Brailsford is set to continue, every day, his earnest promotion of the beverage. ●