

## **From Generation to Generation**

The traditional method for aging and nurturing awamori is known as *shitsugi*, and is still practiced in some Okinawan homes and distilleries. It is similar to the solera (fractional blending) process used to age sherry, some wines and beers, and balsamic vinegar. In the *shitsugi* method, awamori is kept in separate jars according to age. When awamori from the oldest jar is consumed or bottled, it is replaced with some of the content from the next oldest jar. That awamori is then replaced by some of the contents from the next oldest jar, and so on until the newest jar is filled with freshly made awamori. The longer the awamori is aged, the more jars are needed.

With this blending technique, older awamori is periodically exposed to the air and rejuvenated with younger awamori, stimulating the aging process. This allows the awamori to be aged indefinitely. Respect for elders and ancestors is central to Okinawan culture, and the nurturing of awamori using the *shitsugi* method symbolizes the ties between generations. A recent tradition is to gift awamori to newborn children to age along with them as they grow up. Wedding ceremonies may also feature a ceremonial mixing of awamori that belongs to the bride and groom. The *shitsugi* method still remains popular as a traditional way to age awamori at home, though it is now more common for distillers to age their awamori in jars, bottles, or tanks, without blending.