

Miyakoen

Miyakoen is the former winery and vineyard of Miyazaki Kotaro, a pioneer in the Japanese wine industry. It was built in 1896 and the second floor added around 1928. Before being converted to a winery, the second floor of the building was used to raise silkworms. Today, the building has been repurposed as a museum that chronicles the birth and development of the wine industry in Japan.

The Beginning of the Japanese Wine Industry

Winemaking in Japan began in the Meiji era (1868–1912) in the Koshu area of Yamanashi Prefecture. Grapes grown in this area, called Koshu grapes, are commonly used in Japan for winemaking. Koshu is a white wine grape variety—a hybrid of vines from the Caucasus region near the Caspian Sea and wild varieties of grapes found in China. It was introduced to Japan through China via the Silk Road.

With the push for westernization during the Meiji era, both the Yamanashi government and national government encouraged and supported the growth of the Japanese wine industry. In 1877, two aspiring winemakers named Takano Masanari and Tsuchiya Ryuken helped to establish the Dainihon Yamanashi Wine Company, the first private winery in Japan.

With backing from the Yamanashi government, the two men went to France to learn the art of French winemaking. A friend of theirs, Miyazaki Kotaro, wished to join them, but he was too young at the time.

After Takano and Tsuchiya returned from France, they produced wine in the French tradition, but their dry white wine proved to be unpopular in Japan at the time. As a result, the company was dissolved in 1886.

Origins of Miyakoen

The younger Miyazaki was one of the shareholders of the Dainihon Yamanashi Wine Company. After the company failed, he purchased the equipment and started his own company in 1888. Along with two partners, Miyazaki built the Kaisan Winery in Koshu and opened a sales office and wine shop in Tokyo.

The most popular wine in Japan at the time was imported from Europe and then sweetened after being brought into the country. Due to a lack of sales in a country that had not yet developed a taste for European wine, Miyazaki and his partners disbanded in 1890.

In 1891, Miyazaki started to find success by marketing a sweeter wine and by changing the way he advertised his Kaisei wine. He used images of Daikokuten, the god of wealth and commerce; a statue of Daikokuten can be seen outside the entrance to Miyakoen today. Miyazaki soon trademarked his Daikoku brand of wine, and it grew in popularity nationwide.

At Miyakoen, a collection of winemaking tools, photographs, antique bottles, and original labels help illustrate the early days of the wine industry and the growth of Miyazaki's winery.