

## **Château Mercian**

Château Mercian is a renowned wine brand in Japan and is exported as well. The Château Mercian Wine Gallery and Wine Museum are located next to Miyakoen in Koshu, Yamanashi. The museum is housed in the oldest wooden winery building in Japan, built in 1904. The museum has numerous tools and apparatus used in the early days of winemaking in Japan.

A detailed exhibit charts the evolution of the wine industry in Japan. Advertising materials created by Miyazaki Kotaro, the founder of Daikoku Wine, are also on display. Miyazaki's company was the first to succeed in promoting and selling wine to the general Japanese consumer.

### *History of Château Mercian*

The year 1877 marked the beginning of the wine industry in Japan, when Koshu-area businessmen Takano Masanari (1852–1923) and Tsuchiya Ryuken (1858–1940) started the Dainihon Yamanashi Wine Company. The two founders traveled to France to learn the art of French winemaking. On their return to Japan, they learned that the astringency of the wine they had learned to make was far different from what Japanese were used to. The country was not yet ready to accept European wine, and as a result, the company went out of business in 1886.

### *Kaisan Wine and Daikoku Wine*

Using the foundations that Masanari and Ryuken had laid, Miyazaki Kotaro, a former shareholder of Dainihon Yamanashi Wine Company, decided to start his own company. He purchased the Dainihon equipment and started the Kaisan Winery with brothers Tsuchiya Ryuken and Tsuchiya Yasuyuki.

In 1888, the company decided to focus their efforts on marketing and opened a wine shop and sales office in Tokyo. However, Miyazaki and the Tsuchiya brothers ended their partnership around 1889–1890. Miyazaki then rebranded Kaisan Wine using an image of Daikokuten, the god of wealth and commerce. In 1891, Miyazaki registered this trademark. Daikoku Wine would grow to be one of the most popular wines in Japan.

### *Founding of Château Mercian*

In 1949, the winery Château Mercian was founded as simply “Mercian” and it spearheaded the transition from sweeter wines to more sophisticated dry wines in Japan. While sweeter wines were the preference in the 1940s and 1950s, there was a push toward the global taste for dry wines in time for the 1964 Tokyo Olympics.

After 17 years of perfecting the winemaking arts and building the company, Mercian won a gold medal at an international wine competition in 1966, the first time a Japanese winery had ever won such a prize. This brought international attention to Japanese wines. Building on the foundations set by Takano, Tsuchiya, and Miyazaki, Mercian was able to garner critical acclaim for the Japanese wine industry.

In 1970, the company was rebranded as Château Mercian and in 1976 started producing wine made from Merlot grapes. In 1984, after success with Merlot wine sales, the company began to produce Cabernet Sauvignon wines. As the company’s success expanded, in 2006, Château Mercian was acquired by the giant drink manufacturer Kirin Holdings and expanded its operations.

Today, Château Mercian has vineyards and wineries all over Japan and is one of the most well-known wine brands in the country. The Château Mercian Museum is housed in the old Daikoku Winery. It is filled with Meiji era (1868–1912) wine making tools, barrels, and other equipment. The museum has English-language signage.