

LIFESTYLE/GOURMET

Domaine de Montille opens up the future of Japanese wine in Hakodate [Circular Kitchen]

We want to explore issues surrounding food and create a more circular and sustainable food culture - this series features [Emi Sugiyama](#), a chef and co-founder of [FOOD LOSS BANK](#), who shares this desire as a lecturer. This time, we will be covering the prestigious Domaine de Montille of Burgundy, which is currently building a winery in Hakodate, and will consider the impact it will have on Japan's agriculture and wine culture.

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The prestigious Domaine de Montille seeks new territory amid climate change



Located between 42 and 45 degrees north latitude, Hokkaido is cool and sunny, and boasts the third largest wine production in Japan after Yamanashi and Nagano prefectures. In recent years, as the number of talented wineries has rapidly increased mainly in the Sorachi and Shishi areas, in 2018 (land acquisition started in 2017, tree planting and cultivation started in 2019), the prestigious Burgundy winery "Domaine de Montille" with a history of over 300 years... He started growing grapes in the hills of Hakodate.



Domaine de Montille's vineyard spreads out on a hill at an altitude of about 200m in western Hakodate. As of November 2023, Technical Director and Project Manager Baptiste Pagès.

De Montille cultivated 40 hectares of sloping land with good sunlight and good drainage, overlooking the city of Hakodate and the sea below, and planted Pinot Noir and Chardonnay. Until now, varieties such as Zweigelt and Kerner, which are suitable for cold regions, have been the mainstay in Hokkaido, but due to the effects of global warming, central and southern Hokkaido have become suitable areas for Pinot Noir and Chardonnay, the representative varieties of Burgundy. Ta. Conversely, climate change may make it difficult to grow in traditional production areas. De Montille, a master of grape cultivation and wine making that has been around since before the French Revolution, searched all over the world for a new place in anticipation of the next few hundred years, and that was Hakodate.

Challenge together with local farmers and wine producers



Pages moved to Hakodate from Burgundy in 2017 and has been involved with the farm since its inception. She started by growing grape seedlings and is proceeding with the maintenance of the fields. She maintains the existing ecosystem around the farm and cultivates with an emphasis on the environment and health, including pest control using natural enemies.

The "de Montille & Hokkaido Project," which was launched when de Montille expanded into Hakodate, shares the know-how and experience they have accumulated in Burgundy with a new generation of producers in Japan, while working together to produce high-quality products in Hokkaido. This is an effort to discover wine making. In setting up the farm and producing wine from scratch, de Montille's technical director, Baptiste Pages, says he received a lot of help from neighboring grape farmers and wineries.

"As the trees are still growing, we have been purchasing grapes from good farmers in Yoichi, and for the winemaking we have asked 10R Winery, which is a contract brewer in Iwamizawa and is well versed in Japanese wine, to cooperate with us. I also borrowed a lot of wisdom from Ken Sasaki of Norakura when it came to growing grapes and making wine in Hakodate, which has a different geology and rainfall than Burgundy.



Domaine de Montille's 2020 vintage "Gaku Etude" in Hakodate has the meaning of harvest and learning during the coronavirus pandemic in its name. The spicy aroma and fruit flavors of Zweigelt spread, and the fresh acidity changes gorgeously over time.

In this way, de Montille created five vintages from 2018 to 2022, and experts say that the sophisticated taste starting with 2018's "Australia Oser" is worthy of once again showing de Montille's ability. It is also expensive (2021 production and 2022 production will be released after 2024). Behind this is the passion of current owner Etienne de Montille and his collaboration with local producers, who together strive to pursue Hokkaido's unique terroir.

The birth of a winery where you can enjoy Hakodate's terroir with all five senses



Vineyards and the ocean can be seen from the winery currently under construction. Also pay attention to the design, which pays homage to Domaine de Montille's wine making, such as the Y-shaped pillars that support the vines. Photo: Courtesy of Riccardo Tossani Architecture

To drink wine is to drink the story of the terroir, the climate, history, winemaking process, and all the people involved. Etienne is passionate about how he can capture the unique "Hakodate terroir" in his wines. Currently, construction is underway on the farm to create a winery that will include a brewery, an aging cellar, and a lounge where visitors can taste wine on the spot. [Architect](#) Riccardo Tossani is trying to realize the Hakodate terroir pursued by Etienne in architecture. The structure, about half of which is buried underground, shows respect for the Jomon Ainu culture that once existed in this area. Part of the floor of the underground aging cellar is exposed to the soil and lined with barrels, allowing subtle influences such as humidity and microorganisms to be incorporated into the wine as elements of terroir. The roof, which has a concave center like the letter V, collects rainwater that falls on the land and distributes it to the grapes on the farm.

From 2023, we will finally start brewing at our own winery using grapes grown in-house. This Hakodate winery will not only be one of the world's best wineries, but will also become a symbol of the culture of tasting every drop of the condensed terroir in the local area with all five senses.

The dawn of sustainable agriculture and culture for generations to come



Domaine de Montille's Hakodate winery is scheduled to open in spring 2024. The building was inspired by the Jomon period ruins in this area, which is also a World Heritage Site, and overlooks the city of Hakodate and the sea. Photo: Courtesy of Riccardo Tossani Architecture

As de Montille continues to make wine in Hakodate, there will be more opportunities for local producers to learn about their cultivation and brewing expertise, and the level of winemaking in this region will surely rise over time. The wine produced becomes not only a high-quality export product to the world, but also a gem for Japan, a tourism-based country, to entertain guests from all over the world, and the winery becomes a travel destination. De Montille's challenge in Hakodate may also help to establish a way of creating sustainable [agriculture, industry, and culture in Japan, with an eye to the future for generations to come.](#)

Due to global warming, Hokkaido's role as a production center will continue to grow. As climate change progresses at an alarming rate, it is necessary to take action to "mitigate" the causes of climate change, as well as to "adapt" to the changing [environment](#). This initiative in Hakodate can also be seen as a model for change to turn negative into positive impact. Why not visit Hakodate and experience the dawn of evolution in Japanese agriculture and food culture?

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