

Presenting the allure of Japanese wagyu to the world in various cuts

Thierry Voisin

Chef at Les Saisons, Imperial Hotel Tokyo

The taste of Japanese wagyu is refined even when using cheek or shank. This talented French chef, caught between Japanese and French culinary cultures, suggests ways to effectively communicate the delicacy of Japanese wagyu to the world.

"Simmered Japanese wagyu cheek and beef fillet, quenelle de moelle truffe potato soufflé", based on classic French cuisine called "Ripoppé", combines Japanese wagyu cheek and fillet in a recipe that is truly deep and sublime. It's flavored with truffle and finished in a red wine sauce.
●Cut: Cheek, Fillet ●Grade: A5



Wagyu fillet (front) and sirloin (back left) are perfect for a simple roast to highlight the meat's quality. If you cook it just right so as to draw out the Japanese wagyu's sweet fat and fleshiness, just a small garnish and sauce as an accent is plenty.

Thierry Voisin prepares contemporary French cuisine, steeped in tradition, with exceptional sensitivity and an aversion to trends. His classic French culinary techniques traced to Auguste Escoffier combine with a deep understanding of Japanese ingredients, making him one of the most prestigious French chefs well versed in preparing Japanese wagyu.

Japanese wagyu, including cheek and shank, are rich in flavor

—It's amazing that the beef cut, cooking method, seasoning and finish are all different in the three dishes you prepared for us this time. You're a French chef, but have quite a Japanese wagyu repertoire!

"Nice to hear that! Well, I tried not to be too eccentric here. All of the recipes are based on traditional French cuisine.

"Simmered Japanese wagyu cheek and beef fillet", for example, is based on a dish from around the 17th or 18th century with the French name "Ripoppé". This is a dish I used to make as a chef at Jean-Paul-Duquesnoy's restaurant in 1987. I used Japanese wagyu cheek and fillet. You simmer the cheek containing modest fat until the meat is well cooked. After grilling the fillet carefully in keeping with its fine grain, serve the cheek and fillet together on a plate with marrow, truffle patty and red wine sauce. Enjoy the contrast between its texture and flavor."

—The glamorous sauce is superb. The flavor is so rich and subtle that you just can't help but order a glass of red wine. On the other hand, "Japanese wagyu shank, gelée with dried bonito, shoots with kombu cream and pousse" (see next page) matches white wine. It includes ingredients used in Japanese dishes.

"Think of the appetizer menu as cold pot-au-feu. You cook the Japanese wagyu shank in a pot of water over low heat, which maintains the shape of the meat and mixes the excess fat with the liquid to create a bouillon. Once the shank has simmered enough, serve it on a dish with maitake mushrooms, bouillon and gelée with dried bonito flavor, as well as kombu and brown seaweed cream on the side to add a creamy zest."

—You arranged it in the pot-au-feu style because you wanted to mix the Japanese wagyu fat with water for the bouillon?

"That's correct. It's a traditional method of transferring the flavor of the meat to the bouillon."

—Are there any differences in the flavor of the bouillon made with Japanese wagyu and other beef?

"Yes, a big difference. Japanese wagyu has a much richer flavor than French beef. As Okuda-san mentioned in our previous talks, the pleasing flavor in Japanese wagyu fat itself gives the bouillon a unique zest.

You also find plenty of gelatinous collagen in shank that brings a lasting taste.

I would choose a Koshu wine (from Yamanashi) for this menu. Just as Japanese wagyu brings to mind a particular terroir, for me, this wine is the essence of Japan. It goes well with Japanese dishes. It's one of my favorites."

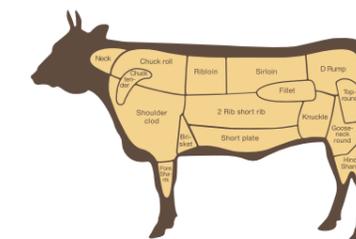


Since starting his career at 15, chef Voisin has fed his passion by researching old texts and new ingredients. His pride and mastery can be seen in his smooth red wine sauce.



Tips for conveying the appeal of Japanese wagyu

1. Japanese wagyu, including cheek and shank, contains a fine flavor. Explore the characteristics of various cuts and create a recipe that brings out the uniqueness.
2. Try to maintain a subtle balance in the taste by adding a touch of spicy and/or sour flavor.
3. The most practical way to communicate Japanese wagyu's unique character is to use typical ingredients from daily meals.



In France, all parts of the cow are used. This diagram shows the cuts common in wagyu dishes, and chef Voisin believes it's vital to communicate the qualities of each cut to broaden Japanese wagyu's appeal overseas.



“Japanese wagyu shank, gelée with dried bonito, shoots with kombu cream and pousse”. The “aroma of Japan” comes wafting from the bonito gelée and kombu cream. The smell of the sea pairs perfectly with the Japanese wagyu shank (middle center).
 ●Cut: Shank ●Grade: A5



The merger of different culinary cultures begins with daily meals

— Please provide some advice to chefs in France, as well as chefs who have experienced the culinary cultures of both France and Japan, on making good use of Japanese wagyu in French cuisine and menus.

“I’m not sure if I should give advice, but there are points to keep in mind for any kinds of meat dishes, regardless of country.

First, be sure to maintain a balance. Japanese wagyu has a rich flavor and soft texture with quite a bit of fat, so you’ll achieve a splendid balance in the flavor with just a touch of sour taste and crispy, moist texture.

Secondly, you should maximize the quality flavor and aroma of Japanese wagyu. Japanese wagyu is rich in exquisite umami, or flavor, and aroma from its high-quality unsaturated fats. Develop cooking methods while considering the characteristics of various cuts.”

— You need to gain an understanding of Japanese wagyu as an ingredient. It’s important to present a dish that is acceptable in the given cultural environment, just as when selling products to general consumers.

“In France, widely popular pot-au-feu would be a good example. Ask them to compare the taste of the shank from France and the shank from Japanese wagyu. It’s likely they will select the latter. Provide such an opportunity not only to French, but also to Italians, Germans, Americans and last but not least, Japanese. Cuisine culture is generally developed out of habit, so the dishes you are accustomed to are the ones in which you can most clearly sense differences in taste and ingredients. Japanese wagyu has a high potential for this and it’s important for people to see it for themselves.

Japan’s cuisine culture is winning attention all over the world now and many people are aware of the quality ingredient called Japanese wagyu. Assuming that sirloin and fillet will continue to be exported, Japanese should also include shank, cheek, oxtail and other cuts in the menu if they wish to strongly convey the unique appeal of Japanese wagyu to French customers.”



Les Saisons uses abundant seasonal vegetables from all over Japan, including choggia beets, parsnip, leeks and the like. Raw or roasted, they deliver a deep flavor.



LES SAISONS

The main restaurant at Imperial Hotel Tokyo. French cuisine is made with chef Voisin’s hand-picked ingredients in a comfortable modern classic atmosphere. In 2016, it won a star from the world’s most authoritative restaurant guidebook in France.

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