

Toshiya Tada, Founder of the Olive Oil Sommelier's Association of Japan

By Liz Tagami | Reporting from Tokyo

Toshiya Tada

This morning olive oil judges from Spain, Italy, Israel, Turkey, Australia and California are making their way across the world's oceans to congregate in a narrow two-story building on a modest lane in the heart of one of the most luxurious shopping districts in the world — Tokyo's energetic Ginza. Top tasters from Japan will join them to form four tasting panels at the headquarters of the Olive Oil Sommelier's Association of Japan for the First Annual Olive Japan International Competition.

The Olive Japan 2012 competition and the two-day consumer Marché which follows is the culmination of three years of work developing olive oil appreciation in Japan by OSAJ's flamboyant and dynamic Founder and Chairman, Mr. Toshiya Tada, with the assistance of the earnest and engaging School Dean, Ms. Tomomi Endo.

A regular fixture in Italy, Turkey and California, Chairman Tada can be spotted wearing his signature bright colors and bringing his joyful approach to sharing olive culture with all people in the world. The former JP Morgan executive and import consultant seems to have found his true passion with olive oil.

"Really, it is quite an honor for us to have such support from olive professionals around the world. People are surprised that there is such interest here, but in fact Japan has had a history with olive oil for over a hundred years because of the Mission Olive farmers on Shodoshima Island."

When not working with Dean Endo developing curriculum or researching olives and olive oil worldwide Chairman Tada can be found promoting olive oil in Japan through his company's involvement bridging the culture and language gap in trade fairs and making key connections; most recently that expertise has come to bear on the olive oil world's newest addition to competitions:



Olive Japan.

Over 140 extra virgin olive oils have been received for the competition from makers eager to add authority to their brands in Japan or as part of their overall launch strategy to enter the Japanese market – a market that prizes quality, recognizes the value of brand, and appreciates the health benefits of authentic extra virgin olive oil, making Japan the fourth largest importer of olive oil in the world.

The OSAJ was established in 2009 to develop the market for olive oil and other olive products in Japan through a comprehensive education program. The certificate programs cover the history of olives and olive production, olive culture, culinary uses, health benefits and sensory skills. To date nearly 500 junior and 110 senior olive oil sommeliers have graduated and additional candidates are entering the school at an accelerated rate; half OSAJ's graduates gained their certificates in the 12 months following Japan's devastating earthquake and tsunami last year.

Sommelier certificate holders are typically product advisors for supermarkets and restaurants as well as importers, distributors and retailers looking to further develop knowledge and skills. Doctors, nurses, dieticians and other health care professionals participate amend the OSAJ staff as lecturers as well as OSAJ students as olive oil is recognized as a reliable source for many micronutrients.

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