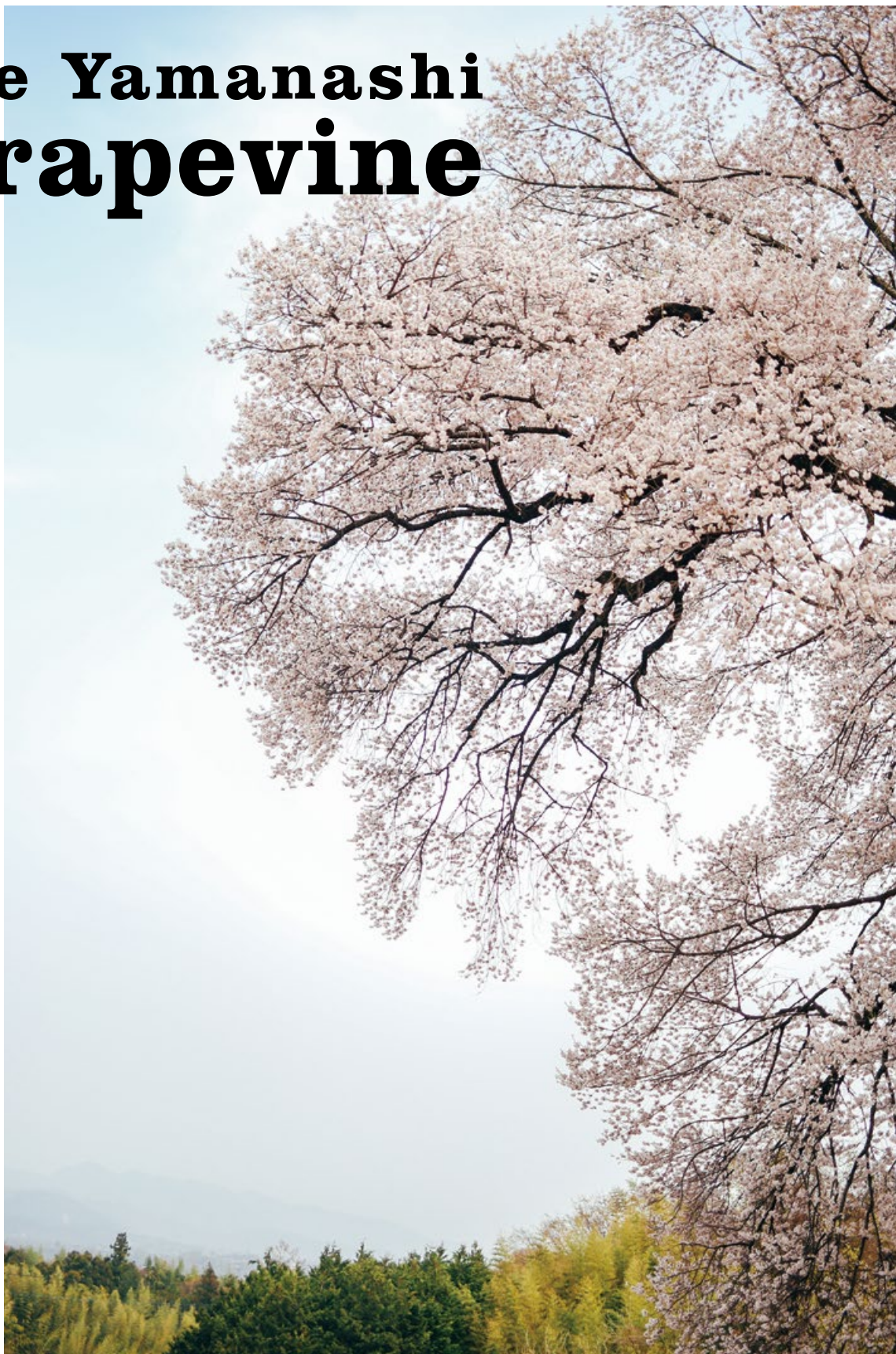


# The Yamanashi Grapevine

2021

The Yamanashi Grapevine is a freely distributed annual magazine aimed at promoting Yamanashi Prefecture by introducing its land and culture to a worldwide audience.







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Situated just west of Tokyo, the picturesque Yamanashi Prefecture is an area often praised for its beautiful nature, its welcoming residents, and delicious fruit and wine. Yamanashi has many nicknames: “Wine Prefecture,” “Fruit Kingdom,” and also “Home of Mt. Fuji.” Furthermore, Yamanashi’s limitless charms don’t just end there!

This year’s issue of the Yamanashi Grapevine will guide you through our favorite spots as expats in Yamanashi— all centered on the theme of *The Arts*.

We hope that the experiences in this year’s issue will inspire you to plan your own visit to our prefecture, where you can enjoy the arts of Yamanashi firsthand.

Every year for the last 18 years, we have been able to create the Yamanashi Grapevine thanks to the wonderful contributions made from the generous individuals at the Osano Memorial Foundation. This foundation had its start in 1988 with a donation from the wife of the late Mr. Kenji Osano, Mrs. Eiko Osano, who had the intention to carry out her husband’s desire to “advance international exchanges, develop the region and create a new culture” here in Yamanashi.

For more information on the foundation and to view past Grapevine issues, please visit the Osano Memorial Foundation’s website ([osano-memorial.or.jp](http://osano-memorial.or.jp)).

Sincerely,

The Yamanashi Grapevine Editorial Staff

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The Yamanashi Grapevine is written and edited by Coordinators for International Relations (CIRs) and Assistant Language Teachers (ALTs) from the Japan Exchange and Teaching (JET) Programme.





# My Little Fuji – Shiraishi Glass Studio

by : McK Komai (ALT from Idaho, USA)

If you know a thing or two about Japan, then you've probably heard of Mt. Fuji. She's a bit shy, often hiding behind the clouds, which makes you appreciate it all the more once you finally get the chance to see her beauty in full swing. Mt. Fuji towers over the lower-half of Yamanashi Prefecture, where you can find crowds of tourists gathering to snap postcard-worthy pictures of her. Other Fuji fans aim for views that can only be seen after undergoing a vigorous climb to reach the top of her summit. As you can probably tell, it seems like we just can't get enough of this big, beautiful, snow-capped giant.

2020 was a devastating year, leaving most places with no choice but to close their doors to the public in an effort to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. Mt. Fuji was no exception, and unfortunately, her climbing season was officially canceled for the year. After hearing this disheartening news, a colleague and I decided to look for alternative ways to enjoy our beloved Mt. Fuji... That's when we stumbled upon "Shiraishi Glass Studio."







## SHIRAISHI GLASS STUDIO

In Yamanashi Prefecture's Otsuki City, there's a glass studio that lets you craft your very own, miniature Mt. Fuji. When I heard about this, I was eager to find out more about the location and pricing—so I pulled up the studio's website.

A few clicks later, I landed on the Mt. Fuji crafting course I had been searching for. The course's description reads, “Come and enjoy our glassblowing course where you can craft a single-flower vase in the shape of Mt. Fuji!” Glassblowing has been around for centuries—dating back so far that most historians are unsure of its true origin. It is said that the traditional art of glassblowing made its way to Japanese soil by the 16th century, as seen in the smooth finishes of windchimes and sake bottles that were documented during that time.

Aside from glassblowing, Shiraishi Glass Studio has a plethora of other crafting options: glass beadmaking, sandblasting, and even molds of your hands or feet made from (you guessed it) glass! I had already decided to go with the glassblowing course, and I even managed to convince my colleague to tag along!

On the Saturday of our reservations, we jumped in the car and headed to Otsuki. After making our way through the mountainous outskirts of the city, we found the studio tucked away in the surrounding greenery. We were welcomed by the studio's founder and head glass-smith, Seiichi Shiraishi.

Mr. Shiraishi's professional career as a glass-smith began over 30 years ago—from perfecting the art of glassblowing through overseas apprenticeships, to displaying his glass art in exhibitions all over Japan. Being able to craft under the instruction of someone as talented as he is, was a true honor. He walked us through an in-depth explanation of glassblowing, focusing on the steps that tend to be rather tricky. Although Mr. Shiraishi prioritizes the customer's safety, he also wants to make sure that the glassblowing experience is carried out in the most authentic way possible. People come from all over the world to pour their creativity

into glass art at his studio. Mr. Shiraishi takes it upon himself to offer English support to customers who need it, while guiding them through the fast-paced crafting process.

## THE CRAFTING PROCESS

After channeling our inner-craftsman, my colleague and I were ready for the first step: selecting our color schemes and designs. There was an array of colorful glass shards spread out across the crafting table that we were able to use as we pleased. I decided to try my hand at a challenging floral design, whereas my colleague went down the more traditional route with some blue-ish hues.



Things really started to heat up in the next step: prepping the molten glass. First, a sheet of glass was melted into a sticky blob in the furnace. Once the gooey texture was just right, we used a long iron straw called a “blowpipe” to scoop up some of the molten glass.

After taking a deep breath, I started to blow into the blowpipe. I watched in awe as the molten glass on the other end slowly began to inflate like a balloon. The glass kept cooling and reverting to its hardened state, making it rather tricky for the air to get inside. Once inflated and round, the glass was ready to be reheated and fused with the colored glass shards that we had prepared beforehand. All we had to do was roll the molten glass over the glass shards, and the color fused flawlessly!

The last step was definitely the most tedious. With a large pair of pliers, a wooden paddle, and a wet newspaper, I managed to mold the glass into a mountain-like shape. After adding some final details to the opening of the vase, Mt. Fuji's silhouette finally came into view! I was very satisfied with the results, but we couldn't take our Fuji crafts home

just yet. Glass art needs to cool in a controlled environment for several hours to avoid cracking caused by rapid changes in temperature. We arranged to have our glass art sent to our homes at a later date, then we set off to explore more of Otsuki City.

## THE UNKNOWN CITY OF OTSUKI

Otsuki City has breathtaking views of Mt. Fuji and an eerily charming bridge named, “Saruhashi.” Despite the many charms of the city, it isn't very well known yet. In fact, the launch of Otsuki City's tourism association happened quite recently, meaning it is still in the early stages of development. If you're headed to Mt. Fuji from Tokyo, the JR Limited Express train will stop at Otsuki Station for passengers to transfer to the Fujikyu Railway. I'm pretty surprised that more people haven't already taken advantage of this opportunity to explore the budding city of Otsuki. Now would be the perfect time to discover the city's mysterious beauty, before it becomes crowded with other tourists!

Near Otsuki Station, we found several shops that proudly serve the city's popular local dish known as, “Otsuke Dango.” The main ingredients include: locally-grown vegetables, soft mochi dumplings, and a warm broth. Otsuke Dango can be found at most restaurants in Otsuki, because just about every local knows the recipe by heart.

After a delicious bowl of Otsuke Dango, we decided to stop by the famous Saruhashi Bridge. Literally translating to ‘monkey bridge’ in Japanese, legend says the bridge's structure was modeled after the unique way monkeys would



link arms to cross from one side of the cliff face to the other. The bridge was engulfed in luscious plant life, accompanied by a crystal-

clear river flowing beneath. There was a narrow trail along the side of the cliff where I was able to get a nice side view of the bridge. This is where I realized just how peculiar yet picturesque the architecture truly is.

Just as we were headed back to our car, we passed by a group of cosplayers with several professional photographers trailing behind them. This seems to be an increasingly common sight in Otsuki, as the cosplay community in the city continues to grow. Cosplayers are more than welcome to take advantage of Otsuki's vast scenery and incorporate it into the backdrops of their photoshoots. I hope the city's traditional beauty will continue to live on, reaching many new audiences through more modern channels such as cosplay, or even foreign residents like myself.



## A FEW DAYS LATER...

Carefully wrapped and packaged—my little glass Fuji finally arrived at my doorstep. Now, even on days when the real Mt. Fuji is too stubborn to come out from behind the clouds, I can still be reminded of her beauty thanks to my glass replica. Eventually, I decided to take her to work with me to use as a desk ornament. Fast-forward a few weeks later, and my colleagues have already started to show an interest in my new little friend. Her bright colors reflect and dance in the sunlight when it peeks through the office blinds; bringing back memories of how much fun I had crafting her. One of a kind—My Little Fuji. **G**



# Kawaguchiko Music Forest Museum

by : Diego Ramos (CIR from Minas Gerais, Brazil)

**K**awaguchiko Music Forest Museum is just a two-minute walk from the beautiful Kawaguchiko Lake, one of the best places to go see Mt. Fuji in Yamanashi Prefecture. Taking in the scenic views on the way to the theme park was half the fun!

When I visited Kawaguchiko Music Forest, I felt transported to a bygone time of resplendent garden parties. What awaited me was a mini fairytale land where the buildings resembled those of a quaint Swiss village painted in pink. Little streams ran through the park, which I crossed on small cobblestone bridges. There was even a swan swimming in one of the ponds and every hour, on the hour, the Turkish March played from the clock tower! An automated doll dressed as a soldier popped out to 'conduct' the music.

When I went inside each of the buildings it was like traveling back to the Baroque period in Europe. The

architecture and ornate decor reminded me of grand old churches – full of wonder, colour, and music. I found the attention to detail and taking in the elaborate decoration to be a large part of the experience.

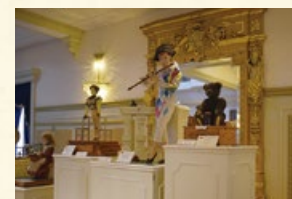
Kawaguchiko Music Forest can be easily toured in a few hours. However, for music history buffs and aficionados of classical music like myself, a whole day might not be enough. I grew up studying classical music and worked as a musician in Brazil before coming to Japan. Since I was a kid, I have always been fascinated by music boxes so I couldn't wait to begin my tour of this magical theme park.

Closest to the park entrance was the History Hall that



houses the music box museum, the automata doll salon, and the automatic musical instrument museum. Here, the staff gave demonstrations and explained how the music boxes and automated toys worked. I thought the most impressive automated toy was a boy who plays the flute. Each sound comes from a paper that is fed through his music box mechanism. His fingers move up and down to cover the holes as if he is really playing the notes. He also 'takes a breath,' and 'blinks' in a very lifelike way. And beside the boy was an

old fashioned teddybear who dipped a wand into a pot of soap water and blew bubbles on his own! It's all very impressive. The staff were happy to answer all my questions



and explain the differences between modern and antique musical instruments as well as their historical significance.

Next to the History Hall where there are live opera performances, opera singers perform with the automatic instruments, including the original Philharmonic Orchestrion built for the Titanic. The Philharmonic Orchestrion was not completed in time for the Titanic's departure and so it was not aboard when the Titanic sank on April 5th, 1912. The decadence of the Main Hall is a sombre reminder of the tragedy and the grandiose dreams that died with the sinking of the ship. It was truly humbling to learn that these musical instruments still exist today and can share with us the soundscape of the past. For example, I learned about the Phonolist Violina, an automated violin and piano combination that took over 250 years to build! Also showcased, was one of the first coin-operated jukeboxes made over 120 years ago.





After the history lesson, I moved to the Organ Hall which has the largest automated doll orchestra in Japan. The organ stretches across the entire perimeter of the room. There are 40 dolls that each play an instrument and 'dance' throughout the organ. The organ itself was made in Belgium in the 1920s and has over 800 pipes. The melodies it can play are like nothing you have ever heard before. I took a seat in a green suede booth to enjoy the show. It was beautiful, made even more so by sitting under the candelabra chandeliers and the elegance of the room. There are 8 different concerts each day by classical musicians and sometimes there's a special 'sand artist'. The sand artist makes backlit images in the sand which are projected onto a screen to tell popular fairytales accompanied by live music.

I really enjoyed exploring all the attractions at Kawaguchiko Music Forest, but I spent most of my time in the music box museum. There were displays and demonstrations of music boxes from countries all over the world. Some of the music boxes were hundreds of years old! And I don't just mean small music boxes like those of children's toys – these antique music boxes were huge and had ridiculously complex mechanical engineering. One even had full violins inside!

I learned that music boxes were originally invented by clockmakers. In fact, clocks that chimed or played melodies like the famous "Cuckoo Clock" were the predecessors of the

music box. In the past, clockmakers were commissioned to build "automata," automatic timepieces, toys, and display scenes for private residences and shops. It was quite the spectacle! Many believed the reason the toys moved on their own was because they were possessed by spirits.

It's widely believed that music boxes were invented in Switzerland at the end of the 18th century. They were a symbol of wealth and status because they were extraordinarily costly and time consuming to build by hand. Only the upper classes could afford the craftsmanship and it was considered a novelty to own one. As the technology improved across Europe, smaller versions were built that common families could afford. Interestingly, music boxes rose in popularity following the Napoleonic Wars. Napoléon gave wounded soldiers in his army small music boxes for comfort, especially to those that lost limbs during battle.

Traditional music boxes need to be wound and will play a melody on loop until it runs out of kinetic momentum. During the demonstrations, I saw a different type of music box that used a strip of paper to play a melody, like the boy playing the flute. Paper music boxes work a little bit differently and are considered "programmable." You can imprint any melody you want onto the paper and then feed it through the music box to play it!

I saw some beautiful music boxes at the gift shop that played traditional melodies. And, there were some neat



commemorative goods too like stuffed animals, ties, plates, and crystal jewellery. If you were so inclined, you could even buy a 4-pack of the toilet paper that is used in the museum. In Japan, there is a tradition of "omiyage" where you give souvenir snacks or small gifts to your family, friends, and coworkers after travelling. If you're looking for unique omiyage, there are local products made in Yamanashi as well.

There is only one official Ghibli store in Yamanashi Prefecture and it's a part of the Kawaguchiko Forest Museum gift shop. As a Ghibli fan, I thought the Ghibli vibe fit in perfectly with the Baroque atmosphere. A lot of Ghibli films blend nature with European architecture and classical music just like at the theme park.


Of course, no visit to the Kawaguchiko Forest Museum would be complete without having lunch or stopping for a snack at the restaurant café. I went on a weekday, but if you go on a weekend for the Koshu wine roast beef lunch, there are two mini concerts during the lunch hour with live piano, flute, and string instruments. The weekday menu features 'European style' fare and each entrée includes hors d'oeuvres, bread baked in-house, and a seasonal soup, all made with seasonal, local ingredients.

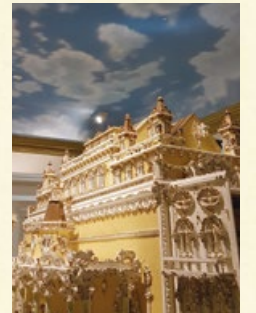
A specialty of Yamanashi is 'houtou,' a noodle soup dish made with thick, flat noodles, pumpkin, and radish in a miso base soup. The chefs put a spin on the Yamanashi

classic and created a Western-style houtou. It was so good! Instead of Japanese vegetables there was bacon, sausage, cheese, and potatoes in a tomato base soup!

While I was outside having the specialty houtou, my favourite gypsy jazz song came on the radio, which completely made my day! Visiting a Swiss village, with an English garden, German-inspired soup, French music, and Italian dessert, completely added to the 'European' experience. To top it all off I had ordered the chestnut Mont Blanc with chocolate sauce and almonds which I ate while looking at Mt. Fuji in the distance. It was the perfect end to the afternoon just as the sun was setting.

The Kawaguchiko Music Forest was an ideal place to spend a whole day filled with culture, history, entertainment, and above all else, relaxation. It's an amazing place for all ages, from small kids to adults.

If you're like me, and are deeply interested in classical music and its place in history, then Kawaguchiko Music Forest will transport you to another world. I had the most amazing time and wish you a happy visit to Kawaguchiko Music Forest! 





# Lumière Winery – Restaurant Zelkova

by : Camille Lé (CIR from Paris, France)

An inspiring encounter with a French cuisine chef in the wine country of Japan



## Wine culture in Yamanashi: when Japanese winemakers meet French techniques

Yamanashi Prefecture, often cited as the birthplace of Japanese wine, is covered in vineyards nestled within the mountains, and is home to over 90 different wineries. Furthermore, in August of 2019, it was declared “Wine Prefecture” by its governor. The wine culture in Yamanashi traces back to the 19th century and is one of the many testimonies to the dynamic exchanges between France and Japan. In fact, in 1877, two young men from the town of Katsunuma were dispatched to the Champagne region in France to learn more about wine-making techniques and bring them back to Yamanashi. In modern times, it has since become quite common for Japanese winemakers to spend time studying and gaining skills in France. For those cultural and historical reasons, as a French person, living in the wine country of Japan is very exciting; when I first arrived here I could not help but feel excited to discover all the wines Yamanashi had to offer.

However, wine is not often something enjoyed alone: it plays the essential role of bringing out all the flavors of the dish it accompanies. In France, the act of wine and food pairing is considered a rather sophisticated art, and there is nothing more delightful than having one's taste buds stimulated by the marriage of a good dish with good wine!





## French cuisine with a Yamanashi Twist

The in-house restaurant of Lumière Winery, one of the oldest wineries in the country was a must-go spot for me. Located in Fuefuki city, Winery Restaurant Zelkova seemed to be the ideal place to enjoy French cuisine arranged with fresh local ingredients, while tasting some delicious wine and gazing at the gorgeous vineyards surrounding the area. And because good food always tastes better with great company, I brought my close friend Diego who loves eating and drinking just as much as I.

Fuefuki city is registered as a part of the Host Town Initiative run by the country ahead of the Tokyo Olympic & Paralympic Games. Their primary focus as a Host Town is to share and spread Thai culture across the city. To compliment this special opportunity, Zelkova had offered a menu with Thai influences at the time of our visit. I was very curious as to what kind of dishes would be served by a Japanese chef cooking Thai-inspired French cuisine made with Yamanashi ingredients.

Our culinary adventure started with a refreshing salad that showcased various fruit grown in Yamanashi, which included: Japanese pears, persimmons, kiwis, apples, and figs. Indeed, Yamanashi is not only known as the wine country but also the fruit kingdom of Japan! I rarely eat salads that have fruit in it, but Zelkova's was exquisite. The sweetness of the fruit and the sourness of the dressing blended well in harmony making a great dish. Next came a cold pumpkin soup with coconut and cinnamon: an exotic and unusual mix that we really enjoyed.

The next dish was trout served on a bed of various vegetables with a hazelnut and butter sauce. The fish was perfectly cooked and the sauce, although thick and complex, did not overwhelm the delicateness of the fish. Following, the main dish was a slab of beef raised at the foot of Mount Fuji, served with an olive oil-based sauce delivering fresh aromas of coriander and chives. Koshu beef might not be as famous as other kinds of Wagyu (Japanese beef), but it is tender and flavorful, and definitely deserves more recognition!

As a final sweet note to this symphony of flavors, we were served a hot banana beignet with a chocolate drizzle, passion fruit sauce, and vanilla ice cream on the side. This simple and nostalgic flavor reminded me of my childhood.

Of course, all of the dishes were paired with a selection of wines from Lumière Winery: first came a sparkling wine served as an aperitif (a starter), then we had a Koshu white wine that perfectly enhanced the subtle flavor of the trout, and lastly a red wine to savor with the beef. I enjoyed all of the wines but I have to say that my favorite was the white Koshu. The skin of the unique Yamanashi native Koshu grape turns purple during years of fermentation, hence the beautiful purple-pink undertones of the wine.



## French cuisine by a Japanese chef in the land of Fuji, Fruit, and Wine

After the meal, we got to meet Mr. Shoji Hirota, the man behind today's culinary creations. Meeting a chef and hearing about his inspirations and core values is not an opportunity given to everyone so I felt extremely lucky to be able to engage in a conversation with him.

Originally from Kochi Prefecture, on the rural island of Shikoku, Mr. Hirota was raised in an environment where he would often eat the same food every day. After trying other cuisines, he decided to embrace a career in culinary arts. Through the introduction of a chef he met by chance, he was given the opportunity to work at Hotel Okura in Tokyo.

He then sharpened his skills in three-star restaurants in both the United States and France before he eventually became the head chef of Zelkova, where he has been working for the past 12 years. I found his journey from being a boy living in the countryside to a chef in some of the most renowned restaurants in Tokyo and abroad absolutely amazing.

This was certainly all thanks to the right encounters he made at the right time! His story about how human connections can influence a life path was very inspiring.

Our editors' team chose *The Arts* as the main theme of this year's Grapevine, so I asked the chef if he considered food to be an art. "Well," he began, "if you think about it, music pleases the ears and visual arts please the eyes. And objectively, food is something that you enjoy with all your senses"; this is what the chef made us reflect on, although he does not consciously consider himself as an artist.

However, his ideas about food and the care he puts into making his wonderful dishes really made me see him as a true artist. The seasonality and freshness of the ingredients are of central importance in his cooking; furthermore, the use of local ingredients is at the core of Zelkova's philosophy. In order to bring out their flavor, he even goes on visits to local farms and asks the producers about the best way to prepare the fruit and vegetables they have put so much effort into growing. I was really moved by the respect he showed to the farmers and their produce.

In a globalized world where it is more and more common to find restaurants making use of imported ingredients, and where good eating habits tend to be lost, the chef left us with these few last words: "Leave the big cities, go to the countryside and explore different regions if you are looking for authentic flavors!"

Following his advice, I would definitely recommend treating yourself to a meal at Zelkova during your next trip to Yamanashi. Chef Hirota's culinary creations will help you rediscover the flavor of the simple but delicious ingredients you may think you already know everything about. **G**





# YAMA NASHI LAND SCAPE





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# Nostalgia at the Kawaguchiko Muse Museum

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by : Nicole Oliver (CIR from New Jersey, USA)

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## Innocent Nostalgia

Nostalgia, is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as a “sentimental longing or wistful affection for a period in the past.” Most typically, this describes something that you yourself have experienced.

It is also the strange feeling I felt looking at the work of Atae Yuki. Atae tells vivid stories of adolescence through the expressions of his carefully crafted dolls. The clothing, hairstyles, props, and scenarios of his artworks pay tribute to a generation much older than my own. Inexplicably, I found myself feeling a rush of nostalgia by looking at his dolls, despite them representing an era long before I was born.

Doll maker Atae Yuki created his works with the purpose of bringing out that wondrous sense of nostalgia. “In the past, many kids would wear dirty clothes and have snotty noses, but their eyes

were pure and shining full of hope,” he once said. Alongside the immense realism found in each of the dolls he crafts, you can also find warmth, humor, and a subtle sense of delicate innocence. And you

begin to feel that with each work, you slowly drift away to a world that has been lost in time.

Atae had grown up in a family where his father had made everything the family needed by hand, while his mother was good with fabrics and needle work. It is very likely that he had received his talent for delicate handwork from his parents. After dropping out of high school, he learned to make dolls in a mannequin factory, and it was there that his natural born talent became his passion. Atae Yuki worked diligently until eventually becoming a doll maker with his

own shop praised across the nation, and eventually, around the world.

## Kawaguchiko Muse Museum

The Kawaguchiko Muse Museum gets its name from the mythical Greek Goddess of fine arts, Muse. However, the museums title can also be interpreted as a homage to the many muses from Atae's childhood memories who are reflected as dolls in his collection.

From New York to São Paulo, and even the prestigious Louvre in Paris, Atae's works have traveled long and far, capturing hearts all over the world. However, it is only at his Kawaguchiko museum where you can see over 100 of his splendid works all in one place. Not to mention, his collection is on a rotation that takes place twice a year, so you can see even more during your second trip.

There is something unique hidden in each and every piece, be it their cheerful or silly facial expressions or the innocent gleam reflecting in their eyes. It seems like each work has a story behind it: a group of kids fighting on a basketball court, a fairy of sleep ready to lull you away to the land of dreams, or a teen boy carrying his sleepy infant sister on his back as he encourages her with the words, “just a little bit further”.



One thing that made me feel particularly warm during my trip to the Muse Museum, was hearing the recollections of the other museum guests traveling alongside me. There was a group of elderly visitors who were especially moved by the stories depicted in Atae's dolls. It seems they grew up during the period of time in which most of the art works took place and so his works particularly connected with them. As they walked around the museum, their eyes sparkled like innocent children and they talked amongst each other about their own memories of the past that were reflected in the pieces right before their very eyes.


I remember watching one elderly lady standing in front of one particular doll for nearly her entire visit. After a while, a man, who I can only assume to be her husband, walked up to her to see what it was that she was so fixated on. She turned to him saying, “Don't you think he looks like

Akihiko-niichan? You know, back when he was in middle school. He used to have the biggest crush on Hana-chan from down the block, and he would always pick flowers for her on that dirt path we took every day after school. But then that one time there was a bee in one of the flowers he picked for her, and when he went to give it to her—it almost stung her! She didn't talk to Nii-chan for a whole month after that,” she laughed as the memories came rushing back to her. I stifled a laugh of my own and began to walk towards a different display, but I could still hear the same elderly woman's soft laughter as she continued to reminisce about her dear older brother, as if she was under Atae's spell.

This spell, one of bittersweet nostalgia, took over me as well. With each piece I saw, I felt transported back to that much simpler time nearly 80 years ago.

## An Autumn Escape on the Shores of Lake Kawaguchiko

Surrounding Japan's tallest mountain are the picturesque “Fuji Five Lakes”, Yamanakako, Kawaguchiko, Saiko, Shōjiko and Motosuko. Each lake has something that it's quite popular for. Kawaguchiko, the second largest, is arguably the most visited of the five lakes; its home to a wide variety of, restaurants, art museums and the like many of which being featured in this year's Grapevine.

However, the lakeside town of Kawaguchiko isn't limited to pristine views of Mt. Fuji. What most international tourists don't know is that it's also famous for its great festivals and events, one of the most popular being the “Fuji-Kawaguchiko Autumn Leaves Festival.” 2020 marked the annual festival's 22nd anniversary, so my friends and I decided to stop by on our way home from the museum. Despite Jack Frost nipping at everyone's noses, the turnout was as excellent as always. What makes this event so magical, you ask? Well, of course, it has to be the beautiful “Fall Foliage Corridor.” From sundown to around 10 p.m, a beautiful path of maple trees that are nested on the riverbanks are lit up with beautiful lights. Couples both old and young, families and their canine friends, school kids and tourists from neighboring prefectures all come to Kawaguchiko to gather beneath these magnificent trees to enjoy the fall festival, and make memories that are sure to last a lifetime. 





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# The World's Only Textile Impressionist

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by : Nicole Oliver (CIR from New Jersey, USA)

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*“He was a man higher than the sun, deeper than the sea. The master had a special talent for understanding the essence of things.” - Yamanashi-Based Apprentice of Itchiku Kubota*

**U**eno, Tokyo, 1937, The Tokyo National Museum: A young man of barely twenty, stood awestruck for three hours in front of a small sliver of cloth. But this was not just any ordinary cloth, nor was this just any ordinary man. And it was at this moment, that the young Itchiku Kubota made a vow. A vow to, with his own hands, revive the centuries-lost Tsujigahana fabric dyeing technique and paint not just the world around him—but also, the universe that existed inside his creative mind.

Tsujigahana translates as, “flowers at the crossroads” and is the traditional Japanese art of coloring relief textiles which dates all the way back to Japan's Muromachi Period (14th-16th Century A.D). However, in the late 1600s, Tsujigahana vanished. Its only traces were salvaged from centuries-old scraps of fabric scattered across the country, but not a single record detailing how they were created was ever found. And because of this, Tsujigahana is also referred to as, “The Phantom Dyeing Technique.”

When Itchiku had first laid his eyes on Tsujigahana, he was no stranger to textiles or ancient dyeing techniques. Starting from the age of fourteen, he began studying the many different forms of dyeing and was already pursuing an apprenticeship for yuuzen-style kimono dyeing under the prestigious craftsman, Kiyoshi Kobayashi. However, not long after he made his resolution to revive Tsujigahana, World War II erupted across the globe.

Despite his desire to carry out his vow of reviving the Tsujigahana dyeing techniques, young males were called upon to serve their country. Before he knew it, the young

Itchiku would be drafted and swept up by the tides of war. Consequently, his plans to pursue his vow were delayed by twenty years. According to stories of his time as a soldier, even during his time as a prisoner of war in Siberia he never put down his brush. Paid in money and thick potato peelings for food, he spent many long days in the prison camps drawing illustrations of women for his lonely captors. It would be easy to assume that Kubota would grow discouraged due to the rather dismal circumstances he was under, but instead, he found inspiration in everything. From the frost on windows that would blossom into intricate flowers in his mind, to the large snowflakes that would fall from the depths of the skies. Eventually, he would return to Japan with an overflowing desire to depict these inspirations through the colors and designs on fabric.

Reviving the Lost Phantom Technique was not at all simple. All while making a meager living as a struggling artist to support his wife and children, Kubota spent many long years researching and experimenting in order to bring the Tsujigahana dyeing technique back to life. However, he soon realized that along with the detailed records of the dyeing technique, many of the tools and materials that he needed had yet to be recovered. Yet this did not discourage him. Instead, it lit a fire inside of him, and finally, at the age of sixty, he would finally succeed in producing his very own, “Itchiku Tsujigahana.” Itchiku Tsujigahana can be characterized as a modern revival of the traditional style with his own twist. This technique focuses on expressing clear and beautiful designs, some with vibrant eye-catching colors and others featuring subtle shades and brush strokes all that echoed more than the skill of a textile craftsman, but of an artist as well.

In fact, within the art world, Itchiku Kubota is known as the world's first and only, “textile impressionist.” A title that is well-deserved.

## The Itchiku Kubota Art Museum

As for many Japanese artists, Mt. Fuji was one of Kubota's greatest inspirations. The nation's grandest mountain, Mt. Fuji was once worshipped as a God. The immense beauty of the mountain was, to Kubota, a sacred symbol that revealed a different face to him each time he saw it. And so, it is no mystery as to why he decided to build his workshop at the foot of the mountain in Kawaguchiko, Yamanashi Prefecture. Years later, that very same workshop would be transformed into a museum dedicated to Kubota and his immense collection of fabric works.

If you ever decide to pay a visit to the Kubota Itchiku Art Museum, you will be invited to seek out the mountain's grandiose beauty. Whether it be reflected on the waters of the nearby Lake Kawaguchiko, framed by the vivid red leaves of the autumn season or simply standing proud in all of its glory on a magnificent sunny day, beautiful views of Kubota's proudest muse await you.


But of course, the great location isn't all the museum has to offer. When Kubota was still alive, he would dedicate much of his time to collecting beautiful materials and pieces from across the world to display around his workshop. From the grand wooden door of an ancient Indian castle that greets you at the museum's entrance, to the Catalan-style architecture of the main building, the entire atmosphere of Kubota's museum makes you feel as though you've entered a different dimension. Paying respect to his roots, there is a gorgeous Japanese style Garden for guests to enjoy as well. You can even stop to admire his prized glass bead collection that is on display near the front desk, which he spent his lifetime amassing as he traveled across the world.

However, the main attraction of the Itchiku Kubota Art Museum is, of course, Kubota's personal works. The

ascending pale steps made from Okinawa sand will lead you to the mountain-shaped “Pyramid Building” which exhibits an astounding collection of original Itchiku Tsujigahana works.



Although the works on display are often on rotation, or lent out to other museums, you will always have the chance to view many of the superb pieces of his life's work entitled, *The Symphony of Light*. This series, which had started as a small collection, grew from 5 pieces to 34, over the span of twenty years leading all the way up to his death in 2003. The grand plan for this collection was to include 80 unique pieces that, when displayed side by side, would spread out to reveal a continuous, captivating landscape encompassing his two major themes, “The Four Seasons” and “The Universe.” And within each and every design, would be the intricately placed Tsujigahana flowers. On some canvases, the pale and delicate beauty of the Tsujigahana feels reminiscent of large snowflakes amid a Siberian winter, while on other pieces they glow red alongside a fiery Mt. Fuji, dyed crimson by the rising morning sun. But more than anything the inexplicable beauty of the Itchiku Tsujigahana manages to depict Japan as a nation perfectly, a timeless tradition interwoven perfectly along a modern canvas.

This summer, just a little less than a hundred years after the young Itchiku Kubota first stood motionless in front of that sliver of Tsujigahana fabric at the Tokyo National Museum— 16 of Kubota's very own Tsujigahana pieces made their way to the same museum's display. Brilliantly and beautifully, they stood in the museum, perhaps waiting for another budding artist to see them and be inspired to leave their mark on history with his or her own unique colors. 





# Staff Picks: Souvenirs

For those who want to take a souvenir home from one of the articles listed in this year's Grapevine 2021 Edition, we recommend one of the following products.



## Camille's Pick!

### Kimono Wine Bottle Cover | ¥¥¥



After your meal at Winery Restaurant Zelkova, we strongly advise you to go to the connected Chateau Lumière Wine shop and purchase a bottle of your favorite wine of the meal. You will also find a few things to compliment your own cooking such as seasonings, vinegars, and jams. Our staff pick is a unique wine accessory: a kimono that comes in different designs, including a cute flowery princess or a cool samurai, to dress up your wine bottle in traditional Japanese fashion!

## Nicole's Picks!

### 1. Green Tea & Wagashi | ¥¥

Hidden within the mountain shaped halls of the Itchiku Kubota main exhibit, lies a small tearoom that used to host guests of the artists atelier. Nowadays you can sit in front of well sized windows, peeking out into a hidden waterfall on the museum grounds as you enjoy some of the finest traditional Japanese sweets around. Although slightly pricey (ranging 1,000¥+ for a set), I can promise you that these will probably be the best desserts you've ever had!



### 2. Shingen Mochi | ¥

It is said that every prefecture in Japan has its own sort of local specialty, whether it's Takoyaki from the Kansai region, Hakata Ramen from Kyushu or even sushi which originated from Tokyo. Of course, Yamanashi also has its specialties too! Most famously is the hoto noodle dish, packed full of delicious local vegetables with a special type of flat udon noodles.



But Yamanashi's regional food isn't just limited dinner options, there is also the delicious Shingen Mochi named after the famous Warlord Takeda Shingen who ruled the region hundreds of years ago. Shingen mochi is a staple souvenir of not only Yamanashi but also Japan! This tasty treat is made up of a few pieces of Mochi covered in kinako (roasted soybean flour) and is served with kuromitsu (a.k.a Japanese black honey) drizzled on top. When traveling to Tokyo and back to my home country I always make sure to bring some Shingen Mochi for my friends! Shingen Mochi can be found in about any gift shop in the prefecture so don't forget to buy some when you can!

¥ - Low Price / ¥¥ - Mid Price / ¥¥¥ - High Price



## McK's Pick!

### A Little Glass Fuji | ¥¥¥



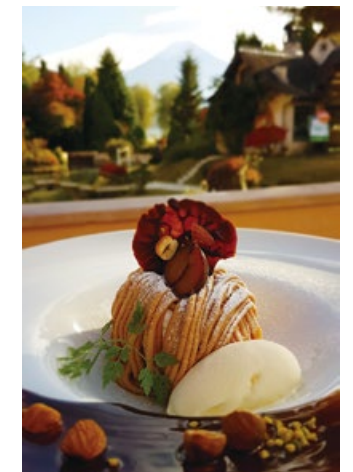
She's handmade, pocket-sized, and adorable. My little Fuji sits on my desk and greets me when I come into work every day. I mean, who wouldn't want a little Fuji to decorate their workspace with? Next time my mom comes to visit, I think I want to craft one for her to take home—that way we can both share the same view of Mt. Fuji, no matter how far apart we are. The best part is that there's not another one like it in the world.

## Diego's Pick!

### Autumn Mont Blanc | ¥¥



Personally, I'm not a big fan of sweets or desserts but the Mont Blanc at Kawaguchiko Music Forest café was out of this world. I had the good fortune of trying the "Autumn Mont Blanc," which is offered for a limited time only in the fall. It was the perfect level of sweetness! Mont Blanc is the highest snow-capped mountain in the Alps on the border between France and Italy. The dessert is made of vermicelli strings of sweet chestnut purée in the shape of that same famous mountain. The snow is represented with a dollop of Chantilly cream and vanilla ice cream. The chefs at Kawaguchiko Music Forest use Japanese chestnuts and almonds to add a regional touch to this classic 19th century Italian dessert!



## Natsumi's Pick!

### Chocolate Soft Serve Ice Cream | ¥



In Kiyosato area of Hokuto City, there is a chocolate specialty shop called Artisan Palet D'or that excels in the roasting of cacao beans. The moment you enter the shop, the scent of delicious chocolate envelopes you. Within this store is Japan's first ever chocolate making studio, Bean to Bar. Here, not only can you buy chocolate but they also offer soft serve ice cream. Enjoying this authentic soft serve ice cream where chocolate and cacao steal the scene, all while gazing out at the beautiful Kiyosato landscape is a luxury you will have to come to Yamanashi to taste.





## A Word from The Editor

2020 was a difficult year for many of us. Across the world, millions of people have experienced loss like never before — Families, loved ones, homes, and their livelihood. Yamanashi, like many other places across the world, has been no exception. Although COVID-19 cases have been low in the prefecture, the travel industry which the prefecture previously thrived on had been seriously hit. There was a time where we were unsure if we would be able to proceed with plans for the 2021 Grapevine.

However, if there is one thing that is certain, it is that humans are strong creatures. When the world faces trouble, we come together to support each other, innovate new ways to face challenges and we continue to strive towards a better day.

At the moment I am writing this, we are still within the clasps of this unprecedented situation. However, I am certain that this will pass. We are strong, and we will prevail. We here in Yamanashi look forward to welcoming you to our prefecture when it is safe, and we wish you the best of health from the bottom of our hearts.

To help plan your visit when the time comes, feel free to view previous years' issues of the Yamanashi Grapevine on our website.

<http://osano-memorial.or.jp/main/grapevine/>



# The Yamanashi Grapevine — Previous Issues —

## 2020

Theme:  
**Wine and Grapes**



## 2019

Theme:  
**Activities**



## 2018

Theme:  
**Fruit Kingdom**



### **The Yamanashi Grapevine**

International Strategy Division Governor's Policy Planning Bureau

Yamanashi Prefectural Government 1-6-1 Marunouchi, Kofu City Yamanashi Prefecture, 400-8501 Japan TEL: +81 55-223-1435

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