

WAGYU: AN IMMERSIVE TASTING & EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE



Wagyu has entered the American restaurant scene to the delight of many diners seeking something new, as well as to restaurateurs seeking increased business opportunities. And the best to introduce new products is through education in conjunction with dining experiences.

In November, a Japanese beef tasting event in collaboration with JFOODO (The Japan Food Product Overseas Promotion Center) and JETRO was held at Tasting Counter, a popular high-end restaurant in Boston. Chef Peter Unger, owner, and chef of Tasting Counter showcased a variety of Wagyu beef dishes in a tasting menu format while Wagyu beef specialists guided the diners, explaining each dish.

In Japan, Wagyu is defined in four varieties: Japanese Black, Japanese Brown, Japanese Shorthorn, and Japanese Polled, while the US-grown Wagyu are mostly Japanese black beef and Angus variety. In Japan, the combination of

Japanese black cattle and Holstein is widely bred and is distributed as a hybrid (F1).

Guests to the tasting event included restaurant owners, chefs, and a few from the media, who all enjoyed the guided tasting menu. At the time of the event, two restaurants were already offering Wagyu from Japan on their menu. The demand for Wagyu has increased significantly during the pandemic, however, Wagyu off-cuts and “scraps & trimmings” have stayed out of the spotlight. It’s only a matter of time the off-cuts take center stage to complement a course menu.

1. WELCOMING BITES

teriyaki beef & scallion, beet beef tartare & horseradish, smoked tomato, wakame, black olive

The first course featured three amuse-bouche made from Wagyu beef “scraps”. While often being discarded, fats and sinewy parts of good quality beef contain oleic acid and are flavor bombs. Using every, each part of Wagyu not only increases the beef yield but also increases profit.

2. JAPANESE MIYAZAKI vs. AMERICAN MISHIMA

wagyu beef strip loin - warm vs. chilled - tartar & carpaccio, beer ponzu, celeriac & parsley, duxbury sera salt

The next dish showcased Wagyu from Japan and the US-grown. To compare, both types of meat were cooked in two different methods at varying temperatures. Visually, the difference in marbling is obvious, however, with beef tartar, the difference in fat melting point varied drastically. The melting point of American beef fat is around 104–122°F, whereas the fat of Japanese Wagyu melts at 59–77°F which notably is below body temperature. With the warm beef carpaccio, Wagyu from Japan had a pronounced, sweet Wagyu aroma.

和牛の殆どは黒毛和種とアンガスの掛け合わせだ。日本でも黒毛和種とホルスタインの掛け合わせは広く飼育されており、交雑種(F1)として流通している。

参加者はレストランオーナーやシェフ、一部メディア関係者で、ピーター・ウンガーシェフのコース料理を体験した。このうち二つのレストランがすでに日本からの和牛をメニューとして提供。コロナ禍を切っ掛けに米国への和牛輸出量は大幅に伸びたが、この様なイベントを通してセカンダリーカットの普及を含め、更なる日本産和牛の浸透に期待したい。

1品目は一口ずつのアミューズ3種だが、全てに和牛の端材が活用されている。単価の高い和牛は脂や筋部分の利用が重要だ。ただ単に廃棄するとその分正肉部分のコストが上がってしまうが、上手く利用する事により歩留まりが向上し利益率を上げることが出来る。また、和牛の脂には不飽和脂肪酸であるオレイン酸が多く含まれており、端材やトリミングにも和牛の美味しさが詰まっている。

続いて日本産と米国産和牛を2種類の調理方法、温度帯で比較。一般的な牛脂の融点が40~50℃なのに対し、日本産和牛の脂は15~25℃と人の体温より低い温度で溶ける。また、和牛に熱を加えると和牛香という甘い独特な香りが発生する。見た目にもマーブリングの差は歴然だが、タルタルでは脂融点の違い、温かいカルパッチョでは香りの違いが実感出来る。



4

3. WAGYU BEEF SIRLOIN BUTT

caraway creamed cabbage, crispy shallots, beef sauce with tallow

Most Wagyu from Japan that is distributed in the US are expensive cuts of strip loin, ribeye and tenderloin. These premium loin cuts are highly sought-after for their tender, high marbling content, and have an excellent beef yield. However, secondary cuts a.k.a. Wagyu off-cuts can also take center stage. For this dish, Wagyu sirloin butt was cooked at low temperature and finished over Binchotan which heightened the Umami of the lean meat. For the sauce, Wagyu fat was also used.

4. WAGYU BEEF TALLOW BRAISED VEGETABLES

house-made sourdough bread, tallow butter

While this dish did not contain any Wagyu cuts, Umami from trimmings and fats were incorporated beautifully into the vegetable dish. The house-made butter with Wagyu fat was served alongside the house-made sourdough bread.

5. WAGYU BEEF BRISKET BOURGUIGNON

carrot, daikon, chestnut, pearl onion, honey cranberry

This is another dish featuring Wagyu off-cuts. In the US, Wagyu is not commonly used for slow cooking. Despite the fat content, tough cuts portions require long cooking times, therefore, these cuts are typically made into ground beef. However, by cooking Wagyu brisket for an extended period, the fat melts beautifully into the stew, adding a hint of sweetness without the excessively fatty aftertaste.



5

6. WAGYU BEEF STRIP LOIN

japanese mizazaki & american mishima, matsutake, black truffle tallow, mushroom sauce

The last Wagyu dish was another comparison between Wagyu from Japan and the US. Even though both Strip loin steaks were cooked at the same temperature, a vast difference showed in the tenderness and flavor, in the fat and the lean meat. An A5 Miyazaki Wagyu with BMS scale of 8–12 (Beef Marbling Standard) was used for this dish. While the US uses a different grading system, the highest quality US prime grade beef has a BMS scale of 4–5. Both types of meat have their individual appeal, however, Wagyu from Japan and Wagyu from the US are simply not the same.

7. PURPLE SWEET POTATO

orange, almond, ginger, anise hyssop, grand marnier flambé

8. PARTING MORSELS

concord grape & red shiso fruit chew, candy cap & cacao nib bonbon, fennel pollen madeleine

The event closed with desserts while the Wagyu guides explained in detail the beef traceability. Each cow raised in Japan is assigned a 10-digit individual identification number, which is used consistently from birth to market. With this number, restaurants and general consumers worldwide can confirm the cow variety and the region where the cow was raised. Furthermore, by checking the calf registration certificate, information such as the name, pedigree, and nose print of the cow can be confirmed.



6

最後の和牛料理は日本産と米国産和牛のサーロインを低温調理し焼き上げられたステーキと比較。同一部位を全く同じ方法で調理されたにも関わらず、柔らかさや脂と赤身の味わいなどは全く異なる。今回使用された日本産和牛は宮崎牛の5等級で、脂肪交雑の基準であるビーフ・マーブリング・スタンダード「BMS」は8~12。米国では同じ基準で格付けはされていないものの、一般的に米国プライムビーフのBMSは4~5ほどとされている。米国産も赤身の美味しさは感じられるが、同じ「Wagyu」と呼ばれていても日本産の品質とは似て異なる。

デザート及び最後の小菓子里に和牛は使われていないが、講師よりトレーサビリティについて説明される。日本で飼育される牛は1頭1頭に10桁の個体識別番号が付けられ、牛が生まれてから市場に出るまでの間、一貫して同じ番号が使用される。これは日本唯一の管理システムで、世界中のレストランや一般消費者がこの番号を基に産地や品種の確認が出来る。更に子牛登記証明書を確認する事で牛の名前や血統、鼻紋などの情報が確認出来る。

Photo credit Ran Duan
ig: @Cocktail_lens



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About Tasting Counter

Tasting Counter is an innovative restaurant in Somerville, Massachusetts, offering a multi-sensory dining experience.
Boston Globe:
Restaurant of the Year 2015
Improper Bostonian:
Best Tasting Menu 2016
Boston Magazine: Best of Boston 2016 / 2017 / 2018 / 2019 / 2020

Chef Peter Ungár

CHEF PETER UNGÁR grew up in Fort Worth, Texas where he got his start early on, deciding in high school that he wanted to seek a career as a chef. At 17, he jumped into the industry with an apprenticeship at Le Chardonnay, followed by a position as garde manger at Saint-Emilion, both acclaimed French restaurants in his hometown.

In summer 2014, Peter founded Tasting Counter. The tasting menu-on-

ly concept is a multi-sensory dining experience that unfolds directly in front of the guest as they watch each course come together.

Operating under the “0 carbon, 50 local, 100 natural” philosophy, Tasting Counter strives toward a zero-carbon footprint, source a minimum of 50% of its products from within Massachusetts, and offer only all-natural foods and wines.

