

KURAGAKOI KOMBU

Just like a mature wine, this premium, cellar conserved *kombu* offers a rich and delicate flavour and aroma.

Kuragakoi, or cellar conservation, is the name given to a process whereby dried *kombu* is 'laid down' for anything from one to a few years (in some cases it gets up to ten years) in a storeroom where temperature and humidity are carefully controlled. This serves not only to remove the distinctive seaweed odour that can accompany *kombu*, but also to increase the levels of umami taste through a process of maturation.

The technique has existed for hundreds of years, and, in some ways, was born out of necessity. For centuries, *kombu* has been transported from the harvesting area of Hokkaido to Japan's ancient capital and culinary heartland, Kyoto. During the winter months, however, this journey, which became known as the *kombu* road, was simply too perilous to undertake and the *kombu* had to be stored

until spring came.

One of the principal exponents of the technique today is a company called Okui Kaiseido, which is based in Fukui prefecture on the northern coast of Japan's main island, above Kyoto. They use time-honoured techniques to produce *kombu* that has an enhanced flavour and aroma. Not all types of *kombu* are suitable for undergoing the process, however, and at Okui Kaiseido they only use sun-dried *rishiri kombu* that has been harvested off Kafuka beach on the island of Rebun, off Hokkaido. Because each piece of *kombu* differs according to not just the location it was harvested in but also the year, climatic conditions, ocean currents *et cetera*, the process has been likened to the maturation of a fine wine, with the concepts of vintage and terroir both present.



Regular *rishiri kombu*



Kuragakoi rishiri kombu

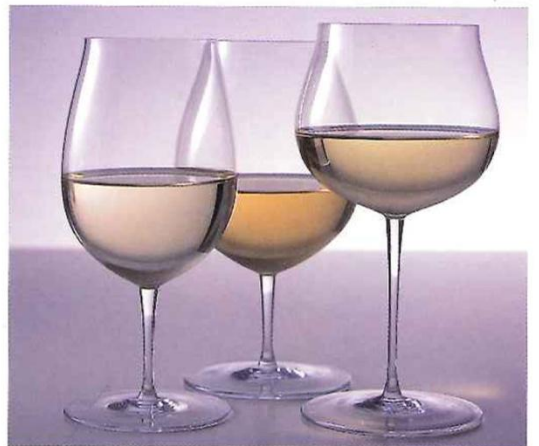
Outward appearance: note the difference in appearance between a regular piece of *rishiri kombu* (left) and one that has undergone *kuragakoi* for ten years.



Worth the wait: as a result of the *kuragakoi* process of maturation, the fronds of *kombu* lose any residual seaweed flavour and aroma, leaving behind a pure umami taste that results in delicious dashi.



An excellent vintage: carried out in accordance with time-honoured tradition, the process of *kuragakoi* is carried out over a long period of time, and can be compared to the process of maturing wine in caves and cellars.



Striking difference: the picture above shows *kombu dashi* taken from different periods of *kuragakoi* maturation which have been soaked in cold water for ten hours. The one on the left has been matured for one year, middle - ten years, right - two years. The colour, taste and aroma differ considerably.

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