

PEOPLE

DEFINED BY PASSION AND DEDICATION

— — —
In Japan, people sweat over the small things: details matter, quality is a virtue, design serves a function and creativity flourishes. We take a look at the standout artisans, hoteliers and entrepreneurs who represent these ideas and are making a difference, and survey a country that offers a model for the future.

Total relaxation Hospitality

Hospitality at the Japanese *ryokan* (inn) has been honed to a fine art over many centuries. At Arcana Izu, a small 16-room hotel on the Kano river in Izu, the traditional format has been reworked and given a modern spin. The architecture combines crisp concrete with warm wooden interiors by Osaka design firm Graf. Every room has its own open-air bath – with natural hot spring water – and great views.

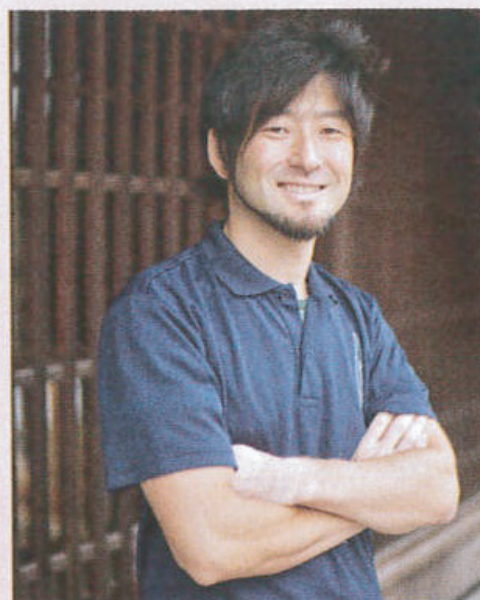
On-site Franco-Japanese restaurant Lumiere is a delicious meeting of the lightest of French cooking and carefully sourced ingredients, many from local farms. The setting is spectacular: the chefs cook in an open

kitchen in front of a 13-metre-long picture window that frames the forest behind. With a menu of organic spa treatments and an option to experience zen meditation at a nearby Buddhist temple, the sense of wellbeing is complete.

Manager Momoe Nishimura (*below, far right*), who works with a dedicated team of 35, says the Arcana Izu philosophy is a simple one. "It's important to be professional but also treat guests with the same warmth you'd extend to your family," she says. "We treat our staff the same way, too."

There are many surprising things about Arcana Izu but perhaps the most unexpected is the peace and tranquillity it offers: it is less than two hours by train from Tokyo.

arcanaresorts.com



Q&A
Yasunobu Tomita
Sake brewer

Tomita (*left*), 39, is a 15th-generation brewer who heads Tomita Shuzou, a 460-year-old sake brewery in Shiga prefecture, western Japan

Question: Do you prioritise tradition over new ideas?

Yasunobu Tomita: I aim for a balance. It wouldn't be interesting if I only stuck to tradition and didn't pursue my own ideas.

Q: How has French wine-making influenced you?

YT: French wine is about *terroir* – local climate, grapes and people. Once I learned about it, I focused on *ji-zake* (local artisanal sake) brewed only with rice from five local farms. We use several types of rice but one per batch. One sake I launched, Muu, is brewed from organic rice grown by a farmer in Shiga prefecture. In the past our sake would sometimes end up in a wholesaler's warehouse. Now we send every bottle by overnight delivery in refrigerated trucks to preserve quality, to distinguish ourselves from the big brewers.

Q: Any food/sake pairing recommendations?

YT: The best way to enjoy *ji-zake* is to drink it with seasonal food produced or caught locally. We do everything to ensure that our sake lives up to this sort of meal.
7yari.co.jp

