



Unique flavors and textures

ONLY IN MYOKO

Think about cold-country food, and “spicy” is not likely to be a word you’ll use. So why in snowy Myoko do you have not only the innocent-looking but super-hot *butakosho* green pepper, as well as the spicy, salty red pepper condiment known as *kanzuri*?

“It really goes back to Uesugi Kenshin,” says Akihito Tojo, president of the company also called Kanzuri. He’s referring to the 16th-century daimyo based in the nearby area, and one of the most popular figures in Japanese history. “Uesugi brought back small, red *togarashi* peppers from a trip to Kyoto,” Tojo-san explains. “They were considered a medicine as well as a spice. But rather than just keep them for himself, he distributed them to the local people.”

What the locals did—and continue to do, as does Tojo-san commercially—is salt the peppers, throw them out in the snow to cure and mellow for four or five days (*yukisarashi*), then grind them up, mix them



Peppers for *kanzuri* go out on the snow (top); four days later, and much mellow in flavor, they are dug out (above). Many locals still do something similar for a homemade version.

Photos courtesy Kanzuri

MYOKO



Photos courtesy Maruni Jeans

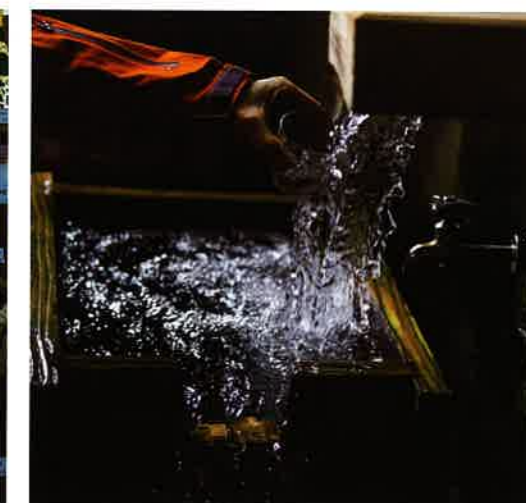
Kengo Nishiwaki, president of Maruni Jeans, spends lots of time at his venerable sewing machine. The Bishamon line (center) uses the Chinese character (毘) that was the mark of daimyo Uesugi Kenshin. As for *kanzuri*, Maruni jeans’ unique feel comes in part from *yukisarashi* (right).

with *koji* spores (a fungus used in making miso and sake) and a citrus flavor, and let the result ferment. In *kanzuri*’s case, for three or six years. “*kanzuri*,” in fact, means “cold made.”

Go over the mountains surrounding Mt. Myoko, and you won’t find either *butakosho* or *kanzuri* (and, unless you’re here at just the right time, you won’t find *butakosho*!). These spicy flavors are definitely only

Jeans products are sold in department stores in major cities—and in their local store. Premium jeans are popular in Japan, and while most are reasonably priced, you can really splurge and go Myoko with a special, ¥200,000 pair of Maruni Jeans!

And, while saké, or more formally *nihonshu*, is hardly unique to Myoko, the three *kura* (breweries) here share some unique characteristics. Ayu



Photos courtesy Chiyono Hikari (left), Grant Gunderson

Traditional craftsmanship is a constant for all three Myoko saké breweries, such as at Chiyono Hikari (left). Kimi no Ii president Tomohiko Tanaka displays one of the *kura*’s many brews. At Ayu Masamune, a spring within the *kura* provides thousands of liters of pure water daily (right).

Myoko—but if you eat something like *yakitori* here, you’ll almost certainly encounter *kanzuri*’s unique flavor.

Kengo Nishiwaki used the idea of *yukisarashi* in creating the uniquely Myoko Maruni Jeans. “Putting the new jeans out into the snow for a few days, then washing in pure, cold water, gives them a unique finish and excellent feel,” he says. Building from a family tradition in clothing making, Myoko-based Maruni

Masamune, Chiyono Hikari and Kimi no Ii are all family owned, have been in operation since the mid 19th century, continue to apply many traditional skills, are housed (for Ayu Masamune and Kimi no Ii in particular) in historic, interesting buildings, and make use of the superior water and rice Myoko’s heavy snows make possible.

And they’re all very, very good.