

# Pairing a Traditional Tokyo Dish with International Flavors

*Tsukudani*—small seafood, beans, or seaweed preserved in soy sauce—is a traditional Japanese dish first developed in Tokyo. Now, it is being reimagined.

Alongside preserving traditional recipes, Shinbashi Tamakiya's 10th-generation owner Tamaki Kyoko has introduced wine and food pairings to her *tsukudani* business.

*Tsukudani* is a mainstay of traditional Japanese cuisine, combining ingredients indigenous to the island nation's natural environment, such as seaweed, fish, and shellfish, with essential seasonings like soy sauce and mirin. The results are sweet and salty morsels eaten as rice toppings at meals or inside *onigiri* rice balls.

*Tsukudani* is also deeply connected with Tokyo's history. In the early Edo period, fishers from the Tsukuda area of Osaka were invited to live in Edo (now Tokyo), by shogun Tokugawa Ieyasu in repayment for helping him during a battle; the fishers named their new home Tsukuda too. By the mid-Edo period, they were preserving small fish, clams, and seaweed—gathered from the nearby rivers, mudflats, and bay—with soy sauce produced in neighboring Chiba.

Established in 1782 in Edo, Shinbashi Tamakiya originally sold *zazen-mame*, simmered black beans, and the third-generation owner also began producing various types of *tsukudani*. As the shop's popularity spread throughout the capital, local geisha from the

nearby entertainment district would drink the beans' sauce because they believed it would improve their voices, and, during the Meiji era (1868–1912), customers lined up to buy *zazen-mame* for their New Year's celebrations.

Shinbashi Tamakiya puts special care into each product. "We keep our sauce separate for each type of *tsukudani*. For example, the shrimp sauce is just



*Tsukudani*, such as the kombu seaweed *tsukudani* pictured here, is traditionally eaten as an accompaniment to rice.

for shrimp, the clam sauce is just for clams," explains 10th-generation owner Tamaki Kyoko. "The sauce continues to mature, developing a sweetness, depth, and luster that can't be achieved with normal soy sauce at home."

## Pairing Tradition with New Ideas

Although Shinbashi Tamakiya's team has a deep respect for traditions, they are by no means bound by them.

"I think it's important not to be satisfied just maintaining the status quo, but to always consider new ideas and to find what makes today's customers happy," says Tamaki. She does not want the store's impressive history to create a tense atmosphere or make customers overawed.

"I try to live by my mother's words: Never forget to be kind and humble, no matter how much experience you have," she adds.

Since taking over as owner in 2021, Tamaki has pioneered new ways for customers to enjoy *tsukudani*. She and her team developed a wine *mariage* course for the dish, pairing Japanese and European flavors in exciting new combinations.

The course pairs three different wines with nine types of *tsukudani* and various other ingredients. Dishes include dried bonito with camembert cheese and apricot jam; eel with dark chocolate and fruit; and clam with Japanese pepper and lemon pasta.

Each dish is a new discovery, with flavors that evolve in the mouth, showcasing each ingredient while maintaining a cohesive whole. The menu, designed as a light summer meal, presents daring combinations that are still simple enough for guests to try replicating at home.

## A Creative Future for Tsukudani

*Tsukudani* has many benefits for people, both in Japan and abroad, in the modern era.

As such, Shinbashi Tamakiya is part of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government's Edo Tokyo Kirari Project that aims to share traditional products from the capital. Based on the concept of "old meets new," the project

introduces Tokyo brands that exhibit innovative ways of passing on traditional, high-quality crafts to future generations.

"The fish have good, healthy minerals such as calcium, and *tsukudani* keeps well for a long time without artificial preservatives," Tamaki explains. The dish is an example of the Edo period's eco-friendly production and consumption practices, she adds.

Ironically, interest in traditional *tsukudani* is waning in Japan. "It is seen as old-fashioned," Tamaki says. Her wine *mariage* is, in part, a bid to reignite interest among Japanese customers. So far, it has been a hit with her compatriots. International customers are also open to the wine *mariage* idea. Tamaki says she hopes they will feel the depth and sweetness of Shinbashi Tamakiya's products, as well as invent new pairings of their own.

Tamaki and her team, too, will surely continue to honor traditional Tokyo cuisine while embracing new ideas inspired by modern, international culinary culture.



The dessert "beans and yogurt chantilly" utilizes the shop's simmered black beans.



Capellini pasta with lemon and olive oil sauce is paired with clams and Japanese pepper.