

Nightlife

Meet the masters

Have your drink mixed by some of Tokyo's true bartending greats.
By *Tamasaburau* and *Ili Saarinen*

TOKYO'S DRINKING scene is one of the best in the world, with boundary-breaking cocktail bars taking mixed drinks to new heights, while traditional izakayas bring you back down to earth in the best possible way. But to really take your drinking to the next level you need to brave a 'master's bar'. Here you'll meet veteran Tokyo barmen who have earned their stripes over the decades and are, above all, maestros of bar etiquette – how to dress, what to talk about and how to savour some of the finest cocktail artistry on this earth. The bars listed below are no casual boozers: they're temples to the craft of bartending, and will reward a rightful drinker handsomely – as long as you remember these three rules:

- 1) Keep your voice down – these 'masters' won't hesitate to refuse loud drunks.
- 2) Note the dress code – wear at least a collared shirt.
- 3) Prepare to pay a cover charge of ¥1,000-¥2,000.

Nervous yet? Good. Now get ready to discover the finer side of drinking in Tokyo.

Bar Oak: Hisashi Sugimoto
Hotel bars usually aren't very inspiring places, but the Tokyo Station Hotel's version isn't like most hotel bars. Moved to its

current location after a six-year renovation completed in 2012, it incorporates red bricks and wood in the décor and is manned by Hisashi Sugimoto, who's been with the hotel since 1958.

This master mixes up his signature Tokyo Station cocktails from 5pm three to four days a week. If you don't want to queue, best be there the moment the doors open for the chance to grab a counter seat and watch up close as Sugimoto works his magic. Once you're halfway through his showpiece drink, squeeze some lime into the mixture: the taste change is supposed to symbolise a train leaving the station.

→ The Tokyo Station Hotel 2F, 1-9-1 Marunouchi, Chiyoda (Tokyo Station). 03 5220 1261. www.tokyostationhotel.jp/restaurants/oak. Daily 5pm-12midnight.

Est!: Akio Watanabe

Yushima's finest old-school bar was named by scientist, inventor and discerning drinker Kinichiro Sakaguchi, but the heart and soul of the place has always been bartender Akio Watanabe. Now well over 80, but as active as ever, this veteran barman has served literary greats including Yukio Mishima over a career spanning



Akio Watanabe at Est!

almost half a century. That's not to say Est! is some outdated relic: Watanabe's signature shaker move looks like he's warming an egg in his hands, but produces contemporary masterpieces like the Luna Rossa and Golden Daiquiri originals. Impeccably balanced, they're tasty enough to merit broader attention, but have so far remained Est!-only concoctions – perhaps because only Mr Watanabe can execute them correctly. Trying to make out the labels on the rare bottles hidden behind the counter is also part of the experience at Est!, as is sharing a joke with the jovial master.

→ 3-45-3 Yushima, Bunkyo (Yushima Station). 03 3831 0403. 6pm-12midnight, closed Sun.

Radio: Koji Ozaki

Radio is quite unlike any other watering hole in Aoyama.



Koji Ozaki at Radio

Every detail at Radio is a result of bartender Koji Ozaki's strict aesthetic and you won't want to disrupt the harmony (read: wear your Sunday best, keep your voice down). This is also one of the few serious Tokyo bars to prohibit smoking, mainly because the cocktails are supposed to

be enjoyed with all five senses. Ozaki has been in the business for over four decades and is an attraction all by himself: prepare for painstakingly prepared mixtures, best enjoyed quietly at the counter with only the master's commentary for company. Nowadays, Ozaki himself divides his time between Tokyo and Kyoto, only manning the counter around ten nights per month while leaving day-to-day management to his many apprentices.

→ 3-10-34 Minami-Aoyama, Minato (Omotesando Station). 03 3402 2668. www.bar-radio.com. 6pm-12midnight, closed Sun & hols.

Tenderly: Yuko Miyazaki

Born and raised in Omori, friendly bartender Yuko Miyazaki trained under the venerable Takao Mori before opening Tenderly, her

own shrine to classic cocktails where she shares her wisdom at bimonthly bartending classes. The joint is developing a city-wide reputation for the quality of both its drinks and its events, which include moving rakugo (traditional comic storytelling) performances.

Visiting during sakura season? Be prepared to queue up from before 5pm if you're looking to score one of the coveted window seats overlooking the nearby park and its huge cherry trees. At all other times, the main attraction is Miyazaki's Adagio, a blend so perfect it's said to have brought some patrons to tears. Best pack some tissues...

→ Omori-Kita Park Bldg 2F, 1-33-11 Omori-Kita, Ota (Omori Station). 03 3298 2155. 5pm-1am (Fri until 2am, hols until 12midnight), closed Sun.



Hisashi Sugimoto at Bar Oak



Yuko Miyazaki at Tenderly