



Hiroshi Sawada doing free pour latte art at his Chicago shop

For this issue of our newsletter, I interviewed Hiroshi Sawada, founder of [Streamer Coffee Company](#) in Japan and owner of [Sawada Coffee](#) in Chicago. Sawada-san has indicated that he no longer directly manages Streamer Coffee Company in Japan but he has entrusted the task of day to day management to others as his business expands.

He opened five Streamer Coffee Company locations in Japan, with the most famous one being in Shibuya, Tokyo. In 2008, he became Asia's first latte art winner in a world competition and has the highest champion score to date. He continues to compete in and win other contests across the globe. He has secured partnerships with companies like Columbia sportswear and Hairo to sell barista products, has authored barista books and even has opened a professional shop in Tokyo where he sells these items and espresso machine parts. For coffee connoisseurs, his name is widely recognized. He has been featured in Japan's DIME magazine, Barista Magazine (as the first Asian person ever featured on the cover), Newsweek and more.

In Chicago, he is known for his military latte which is a visually stunning combination of espresso, milk, green tea, cocoa powder and white chocolate. The drinks with alcohol added from Sawada Coffee are particularly popular, especially his **shochu* with iced coffee and the Bénédictine with chai. The espresso machines are hand-painted with an American theme to emphasize that this is Sawada USA, a unique brand that blends Japanese influences with American preferences. Additionally, many of the coffee-preparation products used in his cafe, such as the milk steaming cups, are Sawada's products through Hario. For more information regarding Sawada and his work ethic, please refer to [this blog post by Hogsalt Hospitality](#). (**shochu* refers to Japanese liquor.)

1) Amy Klouse: まず澤田さんのことについてお伺いしたいのですが、ラテアートを始めたきっかけは何ですか。また、なぜラテアートを日々追求されているのでしょうか。

Hiroshi Sawada: ラテアートに出会ったのは、僕がアメリカのシアトルに2001年に留学している時です。宿題を毎日していたカフェで、注ぐだけで描くラテアートに出会いました。日本でコーヒーを注いだ後にピックなどを使って描くラテアートを見かけたことはあったのですが、注ぐだけで描くラテアートに初めて出会い感激しました。更に、それを飲んでみるとこれまで飲んだことのないほど、フォームミルクがシルクのように滑らかで、その美しさに感動しました。「注ぎ」だけで描くラテアートの美しさは、美味しさの証明です。同じアートには、二度と出会えない楽しさと、長く続けていても自分のアートに未だに満足できていないので、日々追求しています。

1) AK (translation) Tell us a little about yourself, how did you start latte art and why have you continued this pursuit?

HS (translation): When I studied abroad in Seattle in 2001, I encountered free pouring latte art when I was working on homework almost every day in local cafes. I had seen in Japan people create latte art with tools like a pick but the amount of attention and detail that went into making free pouring latte art at these Seattle cafes made a major impression on me. Moreover, I was deeply moved by the taste of the foam milk and the smooth, silky texture which were characteristics I had never experienced before when drinking lattes. This unique type of latte art proved to be not only lovely but also delicious. Since I could not experience the enjoyment I felt on a daily basis from free pouring latte art, I pursued it to the point that I was able to make my own. I am still not completely satisfied, however, so continue to work on perfecting it.



Hiroshi Sawada outside the entrance of his Chicago shop

2) AK: 澤田さんは近畿大学で商業と経済学を学び、シアトルに留学し英語も学ばれたとのことですが、これらの経験は日々の生活やビジネスにどのような影響を与えましたか。

HS: シアトルは、スターバックス・コーヒーのホームタウンですが、そのようなコーヒーチェーン店が沢山あるなかで、「インディペンデント・カフェ」と呼ばれる個人の独立系のお店が存在しています。コーヒーショップが沢山あるということは、競争相手が多くいるということです。そのためそれぞれのお店のレベルが向上し、更に顧客が要求するレベルが高くなっているため、シアトルのコーヒー・ショップは高いレベルにあります。そのことから、常にライバルや競争相手の存在が必要であると考えようになりました。

2) AK (translation): You studied commerce and economics at Kinki University and studied abroad to learn English in Seattle. Did these experiences have an impact on your life and business?

HS (translation): Seattle is the hometown of Starbucks as well as numerous other chain coffee stores. Many independent cafes also exist. Because so many shops are in Seattle, there is competition which drives up the standards that the shops expect of each other, causing customers to demand a certain quality in the products. Coffee in Seattle is high grade. There are always rivals, so I think understanding competitor dynamics is necessary.

3) AK: なぜシアトルを選んだのですか。

HS: その当時、入学したかった学校が存在したことや、街の雰囲気や文化などが気に入ったからです。あと、日本で馴染みのある会社が多くありました。例えば、ボーイング、スターバックス・コーヒー、アマゾン・ドットコム、コストコ等です。また、日本人にも楽しめそうなシーフード料理のお店が多かったや、当時は大リーグのマリナーズにイチロー選手がいたことも理由です。

3) AK (translation): Why did you choose Seattle?

HS (translation): At that time there was a school I wanted to attend in Seattle and I was attracted to the city's culture. There are also many companies well-known in Japan that have their headquarters in Seattle. For instance, Boeing, Starbucks Coffee, Amazon.com and Costco are in Seattle. Among Japanese people, many look forward to the food because there is a lot of fresh seafood cuisine. In those days, Ichiro Suzuki was a baseball player on the Seattle Mariners, which was another factor that drew me to the city.

4) AK: なぜここシカゴにご自身のコーヒーショップをオープンしようと決めたのでしょうか。

HS: 3年前に *Hogsalt のレストランのバリスタのトレーニングを担当したのがきっかけで、シカゴに度々来る機会がありました。また、シカゴには Intelligentsia Coffee というアメリカ人初のワールド・バリスタ・チャンピオンを輩出したお店のホームタウンでもあることから、シカゴの人々のコーヒーに対する要求レベルが非常に高いということを感じました。更に、サワダ・コーヒーのあるウエスト・ループ・エリアには、フィラデルフィアから来た La Colombe やスターバックスといった良い競争相手がいたので、シカゴに店舗を開くことを決めました。(*Hogsalt Hospitality とは、シカゴを本

拠地としてレストラン展開を行う、アメリカで高く評価されているグループ企業です。)

4) AK (translation): Why did you decide to expand and open your coffee shop in Chicago?

HS (translation): I have had the opportunity to come to Chicago a number of times because I was asked by *Hogsalt Hospitality three years ago to train baristas in their restaurants. In Chicago, Americans who have won the World Barista Championship have been opening stores one after the other, such as the owners of Intelligentsia Coffee. Through the efforts of these people living in Chicago, the level of coffee has risen and this city has become almost a hometown of talented latte artists. Furthermore, I decided to open shop in the West Loop area because strong competitors like La Colombe from Philadelphia and Starbucks have opened there. (* Hogsalt Hospitality is a nationally acclaimed restaurant group based in Chicago.)



Hiroshi Sawada pouring his shochu and cold brew mix

5) AK: ご自身のコーヒー・ショップを通じてシカゴの人々に何を届けたいですか。

HS: やはりここでしか飲めないもの、オリジナリティーです。例えば、抹茶とエスプレッソを使って迷彩柄に仕上げたミリタリー・ラテであったり、日本酒をサーブするときのように四角い枡の真ん中にカップを入れてコーヒーを注いで溢れさせるコールド・ブリューであったりと、日本のカルチャーをコーヒーを通して伝えていきたいです。

5) AK (translation): What do you hope to convey to people in Chicago through your brand?

HS: All things considered, the originality of the brand is most important. At this time, the beverages we sell can only be enjoyed here. For example, there is the military latte which uses *matcha* and espresso to create a camouflage effect and the *shochu* cold brew iced coffee served overflowing from a cup within a four corner container. I want to convey Japanese culture through coffee.

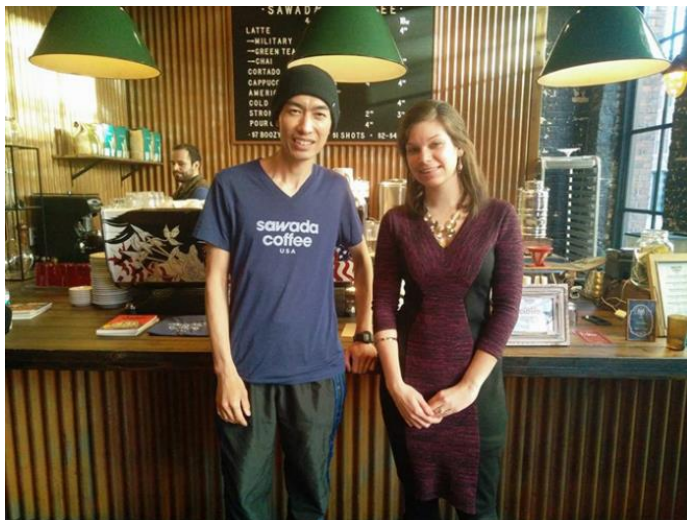
6) AK: ミリタリー・ラテのような、澤田さんオリジナルのドリンクはどのようにして生まれたのでしょうか。

HS: 常日頃よりお客様に他では飲めない商品、他では出来ない体験を提供したいと考えているので、人の真似ではなくオリジナリティを追求した結果、生まれたのだと思います。

6) AK (translation): How did you design your signature drinks, like the military latte?

HS: I'm always thinking about what you can't find in other products and what you can't experience in other drinks, so it came about as a result of trying to achieve something original, rather than a copy of someone else's drink.

7) AK: ご自身のブランドのアメリカ進出に当たり、どんなことに苦労されましたか。



HS: シカゴの中でもどの場所が良いかという場所の選定に苦労しました。あと、場所に対しての立地特性、つまりシカゴのお客様がどのような接客を好み、どのようなドリンクを提供すれば喜んでもらえるかということを考えました。日本とアメリカでは嗜好が違います。日本人と比べ、アメリカの方が甘さのメリハリがはっきりしたドリンクを好むと思います。

Hiroshi Sawada and I after the interview at the coffee shop counter

7) AK (translation): What has been the most challenging part of expanding your brand to the United States?

HS: Initially, selecting which location was best in Chicago was a challenge. After deciding the site characteristics, I thought about how to bring customers in and what drinks to offer them. This is because the preferences are quite different in Japan and America. It quickly became clear to me that American people tend to like sweet, full-bodied drinks.

8) AK: 今後も海外で、ご自身のコーヒー・ショップをオープンされるご予定はありますか。

HS: 次はアメリカのニューヨークに出店するのが目標です。

8) AK (translation): Are you planning to open more shops internationally?

HS (translation): At this time, my plan is to next open a shop in New York City.

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My impression of Sawada-san is that he is an extremely hardworking and dedicated person to his passion of free pour latte art. I admire his skill and drive to make latte art more recognized globally. His use of Japanese products like matcha and shochu are flavors many Americans have never tried until he opened shop here. I had a military latte during the interview and enjoy how his drinks seamlessly blend complex tastes of sweet and bitter to create a truly unique coffee experience. Nestled in the corner of Green Street Smoked Meats, the cafe is quaint but modern and includes Wi-Fi, a pinball machine and a ping-pong table. I encourage readers to stop in, play some games, and try one of his delicious beverages today!