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BY: Justin Egli

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PRODUCT INNOVATION EVENT

From sake milkshakes to chrysanthemum juice and caviar beans, Foodex Japan delivered a slew of unusual and exciting product innovations in the food and beverage realm.

SUMMARY

LIGHT-HEARTED LIBATIONS Alcohol hybrids – such as sake milkshakes and dual shots – provided a sense of light-hearted fun. Meanwhile, unexpected flavours and ingredients – such as marmalade, sweet potato and juniper berry – helped to differentiate traditional alcohol categories.

TOUCH OF INDULGENCE Despite consumers' widespread interest in health and wellness – especially in the food domain – indulgent treats were aplenty. These range from modern takes on traditional classics, such as scallop-flavoured snacking beans and flavourful soba dips, to entirely novel concepts like cake in a can.

CURIOUS CONFECTIONERY From sugar-powder lip gloss to candy science kits, play was high on the agenda, with many products encouraging child-like enthusiasm. Vibrant packaging and graphics helped to create an air of whimsy.

NEW-GUISE PRODUCE From giant strawberries to peeled whole vegetables suspended in pouches of fragrant broth, fruit and veg were presented in curious new guises. Catering to the needs of time-pressed, health-conscious consumers, many of these products boasted long shelf lives.

Light-Hearted Libations

Despite the fact that alcohol consumption is experiencing a downfall in many territories (see [Alcohol Trends 2015](#)), fun and entertaining alcoholic products proliferated at Foodex Japan. These ranged from pre-mixed hybrid cocktails to alcohol-laced milkshakes and botanical mixers.

- **Twisted Shotz:** US drinks brand [Twisted Shotz](#) showcased its innovative selection of alcoholic beverages, which come packaged in double-chambered plastic shot glasses, enabling individuals to imbibe a duo of tasty liqueurs in one hit. Boasting peel-away foil toppers, the 'shotz' come in 16 flavour combinations, including Whipped Cream Vodka/Chocolate Cream Liqueur, Apple Liqueur/Cinnamon Liqueur, and Raspberry Vodka/Blue Curacao.
- **Sake Milkshakes:** Founded in 1690 and located in Okazaki city, [Maruishiyojo](#) is one of Japan's premium boutique sake producers. At Foodex, it introduced a range of mix-and-match fruit sakes in flavours such as strawberry, peach and Japanese citrus fruit yuzu. Each varietal can be mixed with a yoghurt sake base to create a milkshake-like concoction.



Twisted Shotz



Twisted Shotz



Maruishi Jozo sake

- **Botanical Mixers:** Spanish drinks manufacturer [Indi & Co](#) showcased a number of new botanical mixers at this year's show – notable standout flavours included Juniper Berry and Orange Marmalade. It also showcased its famous tonic water, made from ingredients such as Seville orange peel, kewra (a plant extract traditionally used to flavour north Indian and Pakistani sweets) and cardamom seeds. The mixers are best paired with its sister brand [Wint & Lila's](#) gin, made using a five-times distillation process.
- **Sweet Potato Shochu:** While Shochu is traditionally produced from rice or barley, Japanese distiller [Nissin Shuri](#) produces its shochu from sweet potatoes grown in the sandy soil of Tokushima. Handcrafted using a traditional process, the sweetness and fragrance of the potato provides a mild and distinctive flavour. For the summer season, Nissin Shirui also produces a low-alcohol product made from yuzu.



INDI & Co



Nissin Shuri

Touch of Indulgence

Despite consumers' preoccupation with health and wellness – especially in the food domain (see [Rebranding Health](#)) – indulgent treats were aplenty. While some iterations turned traditional classics into modern fusions, others pushed boundaries with new packaging and presentation.

- **Premium Beans:** Aiming to breathe new life into the premium bean snack market, Japanese snack food brand [Beans Tokyo](#) promoted its five new flavours of packaged beans, aiming to appeal to an international consumer audience. Varieties include Nori Flake, Scallop, Caviar, Mayo and Wasabi.



Beans Tokyo

- **Three-Dip Soba:** Cold soba noodles are often enjoyed in the summertime in Japan. Usually served with a traditional dipping sauce made from soy, mirin and sake, Japanese food manufacturer [Inasawa](#) is enhancing this food ritual with new varieties of soba dipping sauces never seen before in this region. These include green soybean, burdock and tomato.



Inasawa soba dipping sauces

- **Cake in a Can:** British bakery specialist [Buckingham Cakes](#) creates ready-to-eat, traditional English fruit cakes baked to classic recipes. At Foodex, it presented individual cakes in vacuum-sealed tins, which provide longer shelf lives and robust protection during shipping. Flavours included Celebration Fruit Cake as well as Whiskey. "There has been very strong interest from the Middle East and Asia," explained a Buckingham Cakes representative at the show. "Japanese consumers have always had a love affair with traditional English culture." 'Cake in a can' is just one of many ways that baked goods are becoming more suited to fast-moving consumption. For similar concepts and more innovations in baking, see [Bakery's New Wave](#).



Buckingham Cakes



Buckingham Cakes

- **Curious Confectionery:** Japanese candy company Heart has launched its new range of DIY kits that enable children to combine science, candy and art. The kits include a 'science candy' set in which kids can make their own sweet potions, and artistic sets to design their own chocolate. Meanwhile, blurring the boundaries between cosmetics and food, Japanese company Konpeitou introduced lip gloss and soaps made from 100% powdered sugar.



Konpeitou



Heart's science candy set

- **Single-Origin Chocolate:** In Japan, Valentine's Day (February 14) is traditionally when women gift chocolates to men, while a second dedicated day, called White Day (March 14) is dedicated to men returning the favour. Hoping to tap into this tradition, American chocolatier Guittard launched its 'single origins' chocolate selection, which uses just one type of bean to create a super-intense and terroir-specific flavour.
- **Gold-Leaf Tablets:** Japanese company Hakuichi showcased its edible gold, silver and platinum leaf for use on cakes and deserts. It also promoted a new line of gold-sprinkle syrups, which can be used to make metallic jelly as well as a gold-leaf tablet. Once dropped into water, alcohol or champagne, the tablet dissolves, disseminating traces of gold leaf. See [Food & Colour: Visualising Flavour](#) for more on savoury gold and experimental metallics.



Produce Push

Demand for and interest in fresh and freshly preserved produce was high – perhaps reflecting the fact that the desirability of imported fruit and vegetables in Japan has **soared**. This is in part thanks to the nation's enthusiastic gifting culture, where certain fruits are considered a prized luxury.

- **Super Strawberries:** Japanese food producer **Bijinhime** produces fruit sauces and jams using giant strawberries. These 'super-sized' strawberries are also available for sale in high-end Japanese department stores such as Isetan. A single strawberry – which is the size of a baseball – can retail for as much as 50,000 yen (\$440). The strawberries have proved to be popular gifts in Japan for occasions such as graduation, retirement and Valentine's Day. For more on the popularity and interest surrounding exotic and new-age fruit, see [Strange Fruit](#).



Bijinhime

- **Whole Veg in Soup:** The 'Whole Peeled' series from Japanese food manufacturer Kubota Syokuhin is a simple concept: a whole peeled onion or tomato in a pouch with soup. Similar to **oden** – a popular wintertime broth in Japan – the pouch helps to lock in flavour and is microwave-friendly. Using the same idea, the company also introduced an exciting new line of cooked chestnuts in coffee.



Kubota Syokuhin's whole peeled vegetable broth selection

- **Shelf-Stable Smoothies:** California-based beverage manufacturer [Dr. Smoothie](#) introduced a new range of 100% fruit flavours at this year's show, including Pineapple Paradise and Mango Tropics. Providing a thick, nourishing concentrate blend, these smoothies simply need water added to produce a refreshing beverage. Each smoothie concentrate has a shelf life of two years, making it easier for individuals to get their daily burst of health-boosting fruit. Ticking the allergen boxes, all the Dr. Smoothie blends are dairy, preservative and gluten-free.



Dr. Smoothie

- **Botanical Boost:** Bangkok-based drinks company [MN Beverage](#) showcased its range of functional Asian herb drinks called NaturePluz. The line includes botanical flavours such as Chrysanthemum (a flowering plant which provides a light, peppery flavour), Lotus Root Jujube Honey (said to be good for anti-ageing properties) and Bael Fruit (a woody fruit containing protein, beta-carotene and vitamin C).



NaturePluz

FUTURE INSIGHTS

DURABLE & LONGER-LIFE Looking to provide long-term nourishment, food producers offered products that were shelf-stable. From 100% fruit concentrate for smoothies that stays fresh for two years, to pouch-packed whole vegetables suspended in nutritious broth, creativity in the realm of fruit and veg was high.

CONSIDER SEASONAL BRANDING It pays to remember that seasonal branding is big business in Japan. Every March, a large number of food and drink companies produce special, limited-edition packaging to tie in with hanami – the cherry blossom season. Likewise, occasions such as Valentine's and Halloween offer tremendous opportunities to strike a sentimental note with consumers.

FUNCTIONAL REFRESHMENT Chiming with insights discussed in [The New Energy Drink](#), the desire for health-boosting beverages was strong at Foodex. Towards this, exciting and unusual ingredients helped to differentiate product lines. Consider how botanicals such as bael fruit, chrysanthemum and juniper berry could help your range to break out of category clutter.

ENHANCE FOOD RITUALS Traditional food rituals can be enhanced through on-point flavour innovations. Inasawa's range of dipping sauces enhance and upgrade the ceremony of dipping soba – a simple and subtle ingredient tweak that makes a comforting ritual a touch more exciting.

Stylus Media Group
London | New York
T +44 (0) 203 837 8300 (UK)
T +1 (646) 665 3501 (US)
E innovation@stylus.com



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