



The Kamogawa food detectives

by Hisashi Kashiwai

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Tuesday Night Book Discussion

Tues, December 9 at 7:00PM, Aurelio's Pizza, 1466 W. Lake St.
Addison, IL

Author Bio

Hisashi Kashiwai was born in 1952 and was raised in Kyoto. He graduated from Osaka Dental University. After graduating, he returned to Kyoto and worked as a dentist. He has written extensively about his native city and has collaborated in TV programs and magazines.

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/authors/2298082/hisashi-kashiwai/>

Book Summary

Down a quiet backstreet in Kyoto exists a very special restaurant. Run by Koishi Kamogawa and her father Nagare, the Kamogawa Diner serves up deliciously extravagant meals. But that's not the main reason customers stop by . . .

The father-daughter duo are 'food detectives'. Through ingenious investigations, they are able to recreate dishes from a person's treasured memories – dishes that may well hold the keys to their forgotten past and future happiness. The restaurant of lost recipes provides a link to vanished moments, creating a present full of possibility.

A bestseller in Japan, The Kamogawa Food Detectives is a celebration of good company and the power of a delicious meal.

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/744310/the-kamogawa-food-detectives-by-hisashi-kashiwai/>

Book Reviews

A father-daughter restaurant duo serves up six cozy vignettes in the first installment of this bestselling Japanese series, translated by Kirkwood. In the back streets of present-day Kyoto, Koishi Kamogawa and her father, Nagare, are running a restaurant that isn't your ordinary dining spot. Sure, the Kamogawa Diner features mouthwatering cuisine, but the thing that sets it apart is the way Koishi and Nagare scrupulously re-create meals from their clients' hazy memories, investigating all avenues in their quest for authenticity. In "Nabeyaki-Udon," an older widower seeks to experience the dish just the way his late wife used to make it. In "Mackerel Sushi," a distinguished gentleman of means hopes to taste sushi just like he used to eat on the veranda of his neighbor's home as a boy. And time is of the essence for a piano teacher on a desperate quest to re-create the perfect "Tonkatsu." Given that only a vague ad in *Gourmet Monthly* has alerted people to the restaurant's existence—the ad doesn't even include an address—clients seem to happen upon the place by sheer luck, or perhaps fate. Though each of the six stand-alone chapters follows the same formulaic recipe, Kashiwai's unique blend of seasonings is more than enough to transform each into a five-star-worthy dish. Koishi and Nagare strive to re-create not only the precise dishes their clients want, but also to envelop them in a warm memory blanket of nostalgia. Readers won't find dead bodies or scandalous affairs here, but they will eagerly devour each morsel of this miso soup for the soul, complete with a purring cat called Drowsy for good measure. A nourishing collection of bite-sized stories with a hearty dash of savory flavor.

—Kirkus Review

Contemporary Japanese authors have created quite an affecting niche, straightforward stories with overwhelming emotional resonance. Former dentist Kashiwai presents the first of his already internationally best-selling eight-book series, now amiably translated by Kirkwood (17 instances of reckon!). Nagare Kamogawa and his thirtysomething daughter, Koishi, run an unusual Kyoto restaurant with no website, no signs, no menu. Yet customers are many, drawn to a single-line ad—"We Find Your Food"—in *Gourmet* magazine. Besides offering impeccable fare, the pair are also food detectives who recreate significant dishes from the memories of those lucky enough to find the Kamogawa Diner's unmarked doors. A widower anticipating remarriage seeks his first wife's noodles. An elderly woman wants the beef stew she had 55 years ago during an unexpected marriage proposal. A powerful man hopes for the mackerel sushi from his difficult youth. A divorcée requests the tonkatsu (fried cutlet) favored by her restaurateur ex-husband. A university student longs for the spaghetti she ate with her grandfather. A businessman solicits his late mother's stew. With impossibly scant details, Nagare satisfies toothsome dreams.

—Booklist

Published in Japan in 2013 to great acclaim, each chapter of this outstanding novel (Kashiwai's first to be translated into English) begins with a different character—a policeman, a politician, a piano teacher, an entrepreneur, a housewife, and a restaurateur's ex-wife—wandering the side streets of Kyoto to find the mysterious and hidden Kawogawa restaurant, which doubles as an agency for "food detectives." Visitors to the agency express their longing to taste a specific dish from their past. Putting together scant clues and partial memories, it is up to retired policeman and now master chef Nagare Kawogawa and his daughter Koishi to search out and successfully recreate the meal. What ensues is a culinary and cultural exploration of Japanese cuisine. The need to taste a particular dish again is deeply rooted in the desire to relive the past and, in some cases, make amends for mistakes. The novel includes mouthwatering descriptions of food as well as a nuanced description of life in Japan. There's also a restaurant cat named Drowsy who inserts himself into the mix.

VERDICT Readers will take delight in Kashiwai's exquisite meals and the culinary history that accompanies them. —Library Journal



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Discussion Questions

1. What's one dish you'd do anything to taste just one more time? Who made it, and why is it important to you?
2. Which sense do you most associate with memory? Are there any sense-memories other than taste that have been powerful for you?
3. Which dish from this novel would you most like to eat? Would you change anything about the recipe?
4. Which method of "food detecting" did you find most ingenious? Were there any tactics for sleuthing a recipe that you might have tried, had you been assisting Nagare and Koishi, that weren't included in this book?
5. Why do you think Nagare and Koishi alter certain recipes? Do you think they're right to do so?
6. What was your favorite chapter?
7. Who was your favorite character?
8. If you could open a restaurant, café, laundromat, bar, library, or any other establishment and devote it to helping people, what would it be, and how would you use it to lift people's spirits?
9. Have you ever come across a local restaurant or eatery that made you feel better as soon as you entered it? If not, do you have a favorite local restaurant or eatery? What is special about that place?
10. Gathering around a meal has always been a strong way to foster friendship and community. Why do you think that is? Do you have a favorite meal memory?

<https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/744310/the-kamogawa-food-detectives-by-hisashi-kashiwai/readers-guide/>



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