


**THE
Japanese**

FARMHOUSE

Kitchen

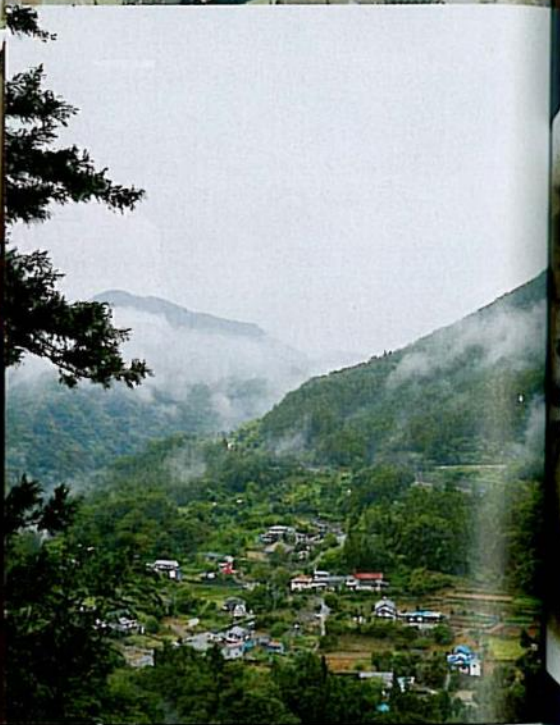
BY
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PHOTOGRAPHS
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A photograph of a woman, Nancy Singleton Hachisu, in a traditional Japanese garden setting. She is leaning over a stone well, tending to several large wooden fermentation pots (sake cups) that are lined up on the ground. The pots are made of light-colored wood with dark horizontal bands. In the background, there is a traditional Japanese building with a tiled roof and a white wall. A large tree trunk is visible on the right side of the frame. The overall scene is peaceful and rustic.

California-born
Nancy Singleton
Hachisu has
learned that to
experience the
joy of Japanese
farm life, you
have to stay put.

Nancy tends to
the fermentation
and pickling
pots she keeps
by her well.
OPPOSITE: Her
collection of
sake cups.



WATASHI GA RUSUBAN," my new mother-in-law told me: She would stay home and watch the house while the rest of the family headed to the graveyard. It was the first day of Obon (an ancient festival honoring one's ancestors), and my rail-thin father-in-law led our procession with a traditional paper lantern fitted with a small white candle, its flame barely discernible in the summer sun. We stopped at the head of the driveway and burned the straw ropes that my husband, Tadaaki, and his father had woven. Their ancestors would come down on that smoke to stay with us for two days. And together with my mother-in-law, we would be there to greet them.

I had come to Japan in 1988 from California to find sushi, and instead found love in the form of a Japanese farmer, whose roots were burrowed deep beneath the house he lived in and the fields he tended. I soon learned some of the family rules: The house must be wiped clean once a day; the fields must be kept weed-free; and someone should always be at home to accept drop-in visitors. Our house, built almost 90 years ago by Tadaaki's grandfather, must be cared for as if it were a living, breathing entity.

ABOVE: "I found love in the form of a Japanese farmer," Nancy says of her husband, Tadaaki. OPPOSITE: Tadaaki weeds the daikon field and grows rice. Nancy handles the food, like air-drying barracuda and salting cucumbers (p. 130).

STYLIST: ALISON ATTENBOROUGH



"A trip to the fields yields juicy cucumbers and other vegetables that almost cook themselves."



Honoring the past is how my husband approaches life, and our house and land give him a sense of belonging that city and suburban folk like me can never understand. I try, but my feelings don't run generations deep. I've been slow to embrace the farm life, and I often choose an alternate route than the one expected of me: Namely, I travel.

When we were first married, my husband could never find the time to accompany me to visit my family in California. "June is rice-planting time," he would patiently explain. Or: "I have to weed—the fields are a jungle." Or: "It's October; I have to crop the rice." Japanese farmers just don't travel. Even for urban Japanese, a typical trip lasts a maximum of seven days, but more likely five. Leaving for longer would be selfish.

But every year when our sons were small, I took them to the United States and France for several weeks at a time, so I missed things back home. Traveling in June meant skipping rice planting, and the apricots on the tree in our front yard ripened and dropped off, wasted. My hands full with raising small children, I didn't so much regret being absent for the rice planting (that's something my husband and his father did that was beyond my ken), but I rued the lost apricots and the missed opportunity to make jam—though not enough to cancel a trip to France.

July and August, however, are sacrosanct for me. During those two hottest months of our sweltering summer, the air is almost palpable and there's a steady chorus of



Tadaaki cooks rice with friends. ABOVE RIGHT: He chars shishito peppers for a salad he dresses with Nancy's homemade miso (p. 130).



cicadas. A trip to the fields yields glossy eggplants, peppers of all sizes, glorious tomatoes for which we have waited all year, and juicy cucumbers that I munch on the spot. I slap at the mosquitoes while gently parting the vines looking for a zucchini, a cucumber or a tomato to pick. I touch the leaves softly, like you would a baby. When harvesting, I can already taste how I will prepare these vegetables: earthy miso to dress the bitter peppers (p. 130); a splash of our local soy sauce, heady from its two-year fermentation, for the tomatoes (p. 130). These are vegetables that almost cook themselves, and nothing will entice me away from home when they are ready to pick.

As I began writing cookbooks, traveling became less a question of choice than of necessity. By not physically being in Japan at planting time and not having one second to go to the fields to pick vegetables when I'm facing a deadline, I'm less involved in the daily rhythms of our farm. But visiting with farmers and artisanal producers around Japan has helped me better understand some of the benefits of staying home—such as tending to one's own fermentation pots or making miso. I don't want to be slapdash about how I approach life: I want to belong to the house and fields. I want to be more like my husband.

Nancy Singleton Hachisu, the author of Japanese Farm Food, lives in the town of Kamikawa, Japan.

For a salad to go with thick-cut pork shoulder (p.145), Nancy tosses onion, cherry tomatoes and green pepper with soy sauce (p. 130).

the JAPANESE pantry

Find these key ingredients at East Asian groceries or check Nancy's favorite online sources, goldminenaturalfoods.com and naturalimport.com.

UMEBOSHI

Intensely flavored sour plums that have been pickled and dried.

BONITO FLAKES

Shavings of a dried, tuna-like fish.

SHISO

A pungent, aromatic herb with large, serrated, slightly sweet and peppery leaves.

YUZU

A small, fragrant yellow citrus fruit with a sweet-tart flavor.

SHOYU KOJI

A seasoning paste made from fermented rice soaked in soy sauce.

SHIO KOJI

A seasoning paste made from fermented rice soaked in saltwater.

