



## AF PARTNERS LTD

# From Japan with Love!

Thanks to the will and vision of YOSHIKI MINAMOTO and MIGUEL A ESTEVEZ ZBE, Hong Kong's connoisseurs of fine whisky have a good choice.

**W**e initially founded business consulting company called Asian Frontier Co.,LTD in Japan in 2007 and in 2011, we decided to reorganize our group structure by placing our head quarters in Hong Kong by establishing AF Partners Limited, says Yoshiki Minamoto, the company's co-founder.

The whole concept was to provide more variation of not only service but also products and culture from Japan to the rest of Asia.

"We initially started by providing consulting services to help middle-sized Japanese makers, willing to expand their business offshore. We began to ship many categories of foods and liquors way back then.

"We knew that our key growth must come from products that carry value and a deep connection to the maker. Finally, we found 6 Japanese whisky factories, 4 of which had not yet begun sales in Hong Kong and other parts of Asia.

Since then, we focus two whisky factories, Akashi Whisky and Mars Whisky with a view to establishing a close relation with these two factories and provide Asia with their whiskies and other liquors and liqueurs," says Minamoto.

Since then, AF Partners Ltd has expanded to China, Hong Kong, Singapore, India, Malaysia, Macau, and other countries.

### Heritage & Quality

"We believe China market will be largest potential market in the near future and more people learn about and drink



**Yoshiki Minamoto (L) and Miguel A Estevez Zbe (R)**  
– Bringing Japan's whiskey-making craft to discerning Hong Kong.

whiskies. We have already started to moving on to China together with another partner company in China.

"Different from large importers, our strategy is more to focus on the product and product creator at the same time. Since our founder is Japanese, it is easier to get to the Japanese companies keen on sales Asia-wide. From the market standpoint, products that carry with them the heritage and distinct quality are much sought after. People like buying history and value, not just products."

### Market Opportunities

"While there is increasing interest in Japanese whiskys, we have well-established and recognized competitors from Europe and America, all competing for market share. The trick is to find the right partners able to work with us and position our brands toward a growing circle of lovers of Japanese produce. We are looking for partners with a proper code of ethics and business values," explains Minamoto.

"Every product entering the market has to work hard to build up a fan base.

This means educating the market to create an interest and a joy in Japanese whisky and this takes time, effort and investment."

"We have so far seen much applause from the retail sector and both our brands are selling well in City Super, Yata, Aeon, Taste and other upmarket stores and at the recent whisky fair in Hong Kong, consumer interest clearly showed the market is ready for honest new flavours. Now, all need to do is promote our label more aggressively so more segments of the market hear of our brand



and enjoy these excellent products."

On the occasion of AF Partner's winning the Most Valuable Services Awards in Hong Kong, the editors and publishers would like to congratulate its founders for their spirit of enterprise and for promoting cross cultural ties via their innovative brands that promise to bring Japan's craft of whiskey making to Hong Kong discerning tables. ■

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