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# Reviving Kyoto's Classic Sandwich

When it comes to egg sandwiches, people might think of an egg salad or sliced boiled egg filling. However, some cafés in Kyoto serve a different variety – the *tamago-yaki* (omelet) sandwich! With its warm, fluffy, thick omelet filling, it's the egg sandwich of choice in Kyoto. If you're curious to try some, go to La Madrague, a café renowned for its exceptional omelet sandwiches cooked with the recipe of a famous restaurant that closed in 2012. Just how did this recipe make its way into the hands of the owner of La Madrague, and how was its popularity reborn? We set out to learn more about this intriguing story.

Interview and writing: Eri Matsunami, Kaho Osada, Aiko Yokota, and Momoha Fujimatsu



## New and Old Beginnings

La Madrague opened in 2011, in a relatively quiet neighborhood near Nijō-jo Castle. Owner Sanshirō Yamazaki and wife Natsumi found a location that had previously housed a café for over half a century. The setting's cozy and traditional ambience made the perfect location for bringing their idea to life.

Named after a villa owned by the French actress Brigitte Bardot which was located on the coast of southern France, the café is a reflection of Natsumi's love for the actress and films. The interior is based on Natsumi's sketches and a part of the furniture was inherited from the previous coffee shop that used to stand there.

"When away for too long, Bardot always longed to return to her second home," explains Sanshirō. "So we also wanted our regulars to feel like this place is for them to come back anytime."

## Restoring Tasteful Memories

First, let's talk about Corona, the restaurant that gave birth to the original thick omelet sandwich. Corona was a popular Western-style restaurant that opened in Kyoto in 1945. Originally catering to a wealthy clientele, it later became an everyday favorite as the economy improved. This popular restaurant continued to

serve customers for 67 years until its doors closed in 2012 when the owner retired.

The connection of these two establishments was all thanks to a local magazine that sought to revive the taste of the now closed Corona. They contacted Sanshirō, who was already the owner of his handed-down café by that time, to recreate Corona's omelet sandwich.

"Shōji Hara, the owner of Corona, imparted me with the recipe directly," says Sanshirō. The sandwich recipe used a whopping four eggs, and a generous amount of milk to create the fluffy and thick omelet sandwich. This was enclosed in soft bread and served with a thin layer of demi-glace sauce and mayonnaise. A dash of *kombu* broth provides a secret culinary addition to the overall flavor. "Despite its simplicity, all of the ingredients really stood out," exclaimed Sanshirō.

Reproducing the exact taste of the original, however, turned out to be a challenging experience which involved a lot of

trial and error. Despite sticking strictly to the original formula, customers pointed out that the taste didn't quite do justice to the original, and that the omelet wasn't as fluffy. Sanshirō believed that the nostalgia of Corona among customers may have heightened the expectations for its original taste. It was up to Sanshirō to meet these expectations if he was to truly succeed.

After listening to the insights of his customers, he decided to make small adjustments. He changed the bread, made the eggs fluffier, and altered the heat and cooking time. After about two years, he was finally able to recapture the original taste, which was affirmed when a customer took a bite and exclaimed, "this is it!" Sanshirō says, "Memories provide the best

seasoning. The process wasn't about recreating the exact recipe, but rather reviving the beloved taste of people's memories."

## The Original Recipe Lives on

If you want to experience the authentic taste of the original Corona omelet sandwich, stop by La Madrague's second café "Le Gabor" located on Sanjō. "It's cooked just like the original quick-and-easy recipe, and its flavors are more bold," explains Sanshirō. By visiting Le Gabor you can compare the differences between the two sandwiches as well as the interiors.

Located in the basement, the café has a nighttime atmosphere, contrasting the brighter, more upbeat mood of La Madrague. The movie-loving couple named "Le Gabor" after an acrobat who appeared in the movie "The Girl on the Bridge" by Patrice Leconte. The interior decor was inspired from the backstage of an old cabaret in Paris.



## Keeping Café Traditions Alive

Traditional cafés like La Madrague are known as *kissaten* in Japan. These are more like your local café back home, that also functions as a

casual space for neighbors and other locals to socialize with the owner and other patrons. You may see an elderly gentleman reading the newspaper, or perhaps a student studying quietly in the corner. They are friendly places where regular customers may know your name and even have their own regular seat.

Sanshirō loves the traditional ambience that can be felt in these old-fashioned coffee shops. He runs La Madrague not just on the concept of a café but on Japan's traditional *kissaten* style.

Unfortunately, with changing trends and Japan's aging society, many of these old cafés are closing down. Faced with this reality, Sanshirō is involved in activities to help preserve Japan's *kissaten* culture.

Just as the original La Madrague was the second home to actress Brigitte Bardot, Kyoto's La Madrague also captures that sense of wanting to return to a cozy and familiar place. In the same manner, this would also be the second home for Natsumi, who sadly passed away in 2014. Her spirit will continue to live on through the efforts of Sanshirō, and the traditions and ambience of this beloved café.

### La Madrague

Map(P13)  
G-b  
Access | A 9-minute walk from Karasuma Oike Station, on the Kyoto City Subway Tōzai Line.  
Open | 11:30 am - 10:00 pm (closes earlier if ingredients run out)  
Closed | Sunday<sup>s</sup> Phone | 075-744-0067

### Le Gabor

Map(P13)  
G-b  
Access | A 4-minute walk from Sanjō Station on the Kyoto City Subway Tōzai Line, or Sanjō Station on the Keihān Line.  
Open | Monday to Friday: 3:00 pm - 1:00 am  
Saturday, Sunday, and public holidays: noon to midnight  
Closed | Wednesdays Phone | 075-211-7533  
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