



# FOXY BRANDING

by **Robin Lynam**

According to Four Fox Saké Managing Director Michael Campion, the product is the direct result of three friends getting together at a beach bar and spending the evening in the company of several bottles of Japan’s most popular rice beverage.

Waking up the next morning with ‘surprisingly soft hangovers’, they tried to remember the brand they had been drinking. None of them could.

At that point it occurred to them that there simply wasn’t an instantly recognisable premium or super premium saké brand which aficionados could order in bars in the way they would a preferred brand of gin or vodka. Accordingly they set out to create one.

Campion, addressing a gathering of bartenders in Lily & Bloom who he was eager to persuade to stock his saké, wasn’t one of the original three.

A former professional footballer turned marketer, he was brought in by the four founding partners – the three drinking buddies and one Ms Tsubasa Nishitani who had been invited to provide the essential Japanese connection.

Five of those bartenders needed no convincing. Arkadiusz Rybak of Zuma, Bikal Ghale of Foxglove, Timothy Ching of Bibo, Max Gurung Jr. of the Privé Group and, of course, Bikash Gurung of Lily & Bloom, had all accepted invitations to create a cocktail featuring the saké.

These were tasted at the end of the session, and demonstrated that Four Fox certainly has something to offer mixologists, while also being perfectly suitable for drinking straight up in the traditional manner.

Having set out to create a brand, the partners needed a product, and it was decided that it should be of boutique quality. Campion explained in some detail how the right saké had been found, and the brand identity developed.

“The guys did a lot of research into where the best sakés are made, and it led them to Niigata Prefecture on the northwest coast of Honshu, the main island of Japan,” he explained.

Niigata is known for a pristine environment in the ‘Japanese Alps’, and offered Four Fox a Unique Selling Point, or in marketing jargon ‘USP’. They wanted to create a ‘slow melt saké’ using locally sourced single varietal rice, and water from melted snow. Niigata has the highest snowfall in Japan. “We wanted something really, really pure that people would understand and connect with,” Campion explained.

Ms Nishitani contacted no fewer than 96 independent breweries and a shortlist of three was arrived at. As it happened the owners of two of them were about to visit Hong Kong. Meetings were arranged at the Mira Moon Hotel, and the right partner selected.

The next step was to create the brand. A little research into Shinto mythology established that rice, saké, swordsmiths, and foxes had the same god – Inari Okami. According to legend, Inari’s fox spirits guard the Torii Gates – the portal between heaven and earth – allowing only pure spirits to pass.

Armed with this information and the name, with Four Fox reflecting the founding partnership of four, Carter Hales Design Lab of Vancouver set about designing a label, bottle and crest. The result – a bottle with a shiny metallic finish, a traditional Japanese cork closure and an LED light in the base – is certainly visually striking.


It bears the crest, which features the gate, guarded by four fox spirits, suspended over rice, and surmounted by three snowflakes. A cut in the metal through which the contents of the bottle can be seen is shaped like a Katana Samurai sword.

The saké itself is of Junmai Daiginjo grade, with no added distilled alcohol and 50 percent of each grain of the saké rice polished away. Only one batch will be produced per year and initial production was just 10,000 bottles, but 50,000 will be released this year. According to Campion, should demand begin to look as though it may outstrip supply, there is scope for further expansion, working with local boutique producers.

The hope, clearly, is that this will be saké’s first international mega brand, in markets including London, New York, Las Vegas, San Francisco, Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Ibiza, China and Macau, in all of which launches are planned. Initially at least Japan will not be a market.

Hong Kong however, certainly will. Four of the five principals are Hong Kong based, and the city’s lively bar scene is the ideal launch pad.

The saké has been available in local bars and restaurants since November 2015, and it is already in key outlets such as Ce La Vi and the Aberdeen Marina Club, as well as in those of the bartenders who created cocktails – or as Campion insisted ‘foxtails’ – which demonstrated the versatility of the drink.

At only 15 percent alcohol, it can certainly also be drunk chilled – certainly not warmed – and unadorned. The founding partners may not be the only ones to find that saké can be an agreeable path to ‘soft hangovers’. 

## FOXY SHOWMANSHIP

Following from the seminar, five of Hong Kong’s top mixologists took to the stage to create versions of their saké foxtails to share with a packed house of bartenders.  
(All quantities/measurements according to each individual demonstrating bartender).

### ARKADIUSZ RYBAK Bar Development Manager, Zuma

Keeping to Zuma’s cocktail style, Arkadiusz’s foxtail is based on the Japanese Roasted Rice Genmaicha Tea that is also known as ‘popcorn tea’ as sometimes during the roasting, some of the rice grains expanded and popped.

He says, “The roasted rice tea brings an extra roasted flavour to the tea. So, we apply the same concept to create our ‘Poppukōn Martini’ or Popcorn Martini by using saké instead of tea and adding Rotovap re-distilled yuzu gin to bring more floral characters to the drink.”



### POPPUKŌN MARTINI

**Ingredients**  
35ml Roasted Rice Four Fox Saké  
20ml Yuzu Gin  
10ml Mancino Bianco Vermouth  
Garnish with Grapefruit Peel



### YURA YURA

**Ingredients**  
Four Fox Saké  
Green Apple Liqueur  
Citrus Juice  
Fresh Passion Fruit  
Grapefruit Juice  
Sugar  
Garnish with Green Apple  
Slices and Edible Flowers



### MAX GURUNG Head Mixologist, Prive Group

Max has opted for a summery foxtail with plenty of summer fruit ingredients. He says, “Although having a gentle mouthfeel, the Four Fox Saké is full of complex aromas of melon fruits and citrus with a hint of plum.

To further enhance the balance between its fruity essence and citrus character, I use a selection of citrus flavours ranging from green apple and passion fruit to grapefruit and a touch of sugar.”

All ingredients are vigorously shaken with ice and strained into a coupé glass.



# Try something new.



**FOUR FOX SAKÉ**  
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**BIKAL GHALE**  
Bar Manager, Foxglove

Bikal says, "As a product, Four Fox Saké is really eye-catching and its flavour compounds are really easy to match with different flavours."

The name also matches with the name of our venue - Foxglove. The theme behind my foxtail is to be on the classic side by keeping to the characters of the saké while adding lots of fruity notes such as cherry, plum and a touch of botanicals from the gin. Spraying grapefruit zest around the rim enhances its citrus aroma. It is easy to drink and at the same time easy to make in any bar."

All the ingredients are mixed with ice in mixing glass and single strain into chilled Martini glass.

## FOX MARTINI

**Ingredients**  
40ml Four Fox Saké  
25ml Tanqueray Gin  
Barspoon Luxardo Maraschino Cherry Liqueur  
2 Dashes Plum Bitters  
Garnish with Grapefruit Zest



**BIKASH GURUNG**  
Assistant Bar Manager, Lily & Bloom

Bikash says, "The idea behind my foxtail is simple and straightforward. During the summer, people like to drink cold beverages so I decided to make the Matcha Iced Latte."

I use 2 teaspoons of Matcha powder from Japan that has been cold dripped with 45ml cold water (instead of hot water) and mixed all together with 120ml cold milk.

I also use homemade grenadine syrup slow cooked from pomegranate juice and water to give the sweet notes and highlight the flavours of the saké.

Served in a chilled coupé glass, the result is a cocktail with the flavours of tea and a creamy texture while emphasising the characters of the saké that's easy to drink and perfect for summertime."

## M N S (MATCHA N SAKÉ)

**Ingredients**  
90ml Four Fox Saké  
15ml Homemade Grenadine Syrup  
45ml Matcha Iced Latte  
Garnish with Green Tea Leaf



## WATER LILIES

**Ingredients**  
45ml Four Fox Saké  
5ml Green Chartreuse  
20ml Honeycomb-infused Late Harvest Wine-reduction  
10ml Japanese Yuzu  
3 Drops Elemakule Tikki Bitters  
6-8pcs Italian Basil Leaves  
1pc Thyme Sprig

**TIMOTHY CHING**  
Bar Manager, Biba

From Biba, we have the flamboyant man of action, Timothy who decided to pay homage to the French painter Monet and his Water Lilies series - an iconic collection of masterpieces in art history.

"My foxtail is a perfect herbaceous blend of Italian basil and thyme with Four Fox Saké, and Green Chartreuse sweetened with honeycomb-infused late harvest wine-reduction - all balanced with Japanese yuzu and Elemakule Tiki Bitters."

Muddle basil leaves and thyme. Add all other ingredients and shake hard with ice. High pour and shake again before double strain into a chilled coupé glass.