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## 会見

INTERVIEW

## Focus on Japanese grills and charcoals with two great companies

Interview with Mr Margoni, founder of Margoni Grill, and Mr Yachi, president of Yachiringyo Co., Ltd.

While the BBQ season is reaching its peak, we have met two companies for a crossed interview on Japanese grills and charcoal. Margoni Grill is a Swiss company importing Japanese grills and charcoal. Those grills have been used by Michelin chefs for years because of their many qualities and are now getting more popular among grill enthusiasts. YACHIRINGYO Co., Ltd. is a century-old Japanese charcoal producer from Iwate Prefecture. They produce one of the best charcoals in the world which is available on Margoni's web shop. Mr. Margoni (founder of Margoni Grill) as well as Mr Yachi (President of Yachiringyo) and Mr. Watanabe (Manager of charcoal division) kindly explained to us what the specificities of Japanese grills and charcoals are and why they believe Switzerland is a good market for it.

### *Could you introduce your company?*

Margoni Grill (MG) is a company located in Zurich. We sell Japanese grills and charcoal as well as related accessories. Our main selling channel is online. We also have local retailers in



Mr Margoni using a Margoni Grill

Zurich, Bern and Freiburg, Germany. Most of our customers are in Switzerland and Germany.

YACHIRINGYO (YR) was founded in 1916. The company was founded by my great-grandfather. We have 86 employees. We are dedicated to producing the best possible charcoal. Four years ago, we became the first charcoal company to receive the Prime Minister's award for the quality of our product.

We believe this is a collective effort as there are 100 other companies producing charcoal in Iwate Prefecture. We teach each other to improve our products.

### *What are the specificities and advantages of Japanese grills?*

(MG) Grills have been used in Japan since the Edo era and have continuously been improved since. Today, the Japanese grills are still mainly made by hand. They look nice but are also especially efficient. Among their qualities, they are light and compact which makes them perfect to have them on the table for all guests to use them. Another important feature is that they can cook at high temperature and evenly. This is the reason why many Michelin chefs are using them in their restaurant kitchens.

(YR) BBQs are also popular in other countries, but in most cases a kettle grill is used. One person cooks the food and brings it to the table. In Japan, people use small table grills. Everyone can use them. Our charcoal is ideal for these compact size grills.

### *What are the characteristics of Japanese charcoal?*

(YR) There are two main types of charcoal in Japan: Black and White. Iwate charcoal is a black charcoal.

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Its typical characteristics are:

It is quick to ignite (only about 15 minutes to be ready to use).

It does not explode.

It produces a higher temperature allowing the food to cook well and evenly.

It smells and smokes less as it is free from impurities, thanks to the production process.

It is especially aesthetic thanks to its clean wood cross section.

*What kind of food stuffs and recipes are especially recommended for this type of cooking?*

(YR) It can suit any kind of food – BBQ, robata grill (typical Japanese grill). It goes with everything from seafood to meat, including fish and vegetables. Charcoal improves the aroma of the food compared to other cooking methods.

(MG) Very popular are the grills of course for Japanese Grilling such as Yakitori, Yakiniku and Robata. Michelin chefs have started to use it for local meats and recipes. It is a growing trend. Several cooking books have been published recently about it.

In fact, they will also work very well with local sausage, Swiss table grill specialties and any cut of meat. They work very well with the thin meat cuts used for “charbonnade.”

*How do you see the Swiss market?*

(YR) Charcoal is light and has a large volume compared to its mass,



Mr Yachi, President, and fourth generation heading the family business

which inevitably increases transport costs.

It is difficult to sell charcoal unless the market has the purchasing power to meet this cost challenge. We believe that Switzerland is a market that can meet this challenge. In addition, Switzerland has both a favorable climate and a culture of charcoal.

In fact, we connected with Mr. Margoni two years ago. This was the beginning of our efforts to export overseas. We exported for the first time in February 2021. It is challenging. Japanese charcoal is not well known abroad besides Binchōtan. Few companies are exporting. For us, exporting our charcoal is also a way to introduce another aspect of the Japanese culture to other countries.

(MG) There is a large potential because people in Switzerland really appreciate grilling. Plus, we are used to cooking at the table and sharing it all together, like fondue and charbonnade. Japanese grills are ideal for that as they go on the table. Sitting in the summer outside

with friends at the table and being able to grill together over charcoal at the table is a fantastic experience.

*Have you faced any difficulties exporting charcoal?*

(YR) Transport is the most difficult aspect. Charcoal is comparatively expensive to export because it has a high-volume low-weight ratio. Plus, shipping costs have increased fivefold due to COVID.

However, we believe that this problem will eventually be solved and that it will be possible to transport sufficient quantities of charcoal in the future.

Another challenge is that charcoal is classified as “dangerous goods.” It was difficult to find a shipping company willing to undertake the transport to Europe.

*What kind of customers do you have in Switzerland?*

(MG) We started with restaurants mostly. Currently, I would say they represent half of our customers.

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Often people liked what they experienced at the restaurant and want to have the same experience at home. Private customers see the trending on social media too and learn how to use it. There are thousands of posts with the Japanese charcoal grills on Youtube, Instagram & Co.

*Mr Margoni, please tell us what your price range is?*

The first model starts at 150 francs and goes up to 1000 for the largest grills for professional use. The best-

selling model “Pro-Line Long” costs 450 francs, but very popular for private use is also the model “Family & Friends” for 240 francs.

We sell Iwate charcoal at 78.50 francs for 6 kilograms. With free shipment. It is worth saying that Iwate charcoal burns for several hours. The authentic taste of Iwate Charcoal makes you grill as if you were in Japan!

*Mr Yachi, please tell us more about your forest protection activities?*

We have been involved in forest restoration activities for years. Well

before we started to talk about SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals). We need wood to make charcoal. Therefore, it is important to protect it. Forests and trees have their lifecycle. After 60-80 years, trees will no longer sprout. We cut down trees at the right time and utilize the harvested trees. Charcoal is one of the ways to use this precious resource. Thanks to it, the forests of Iwate can be regenerated and recycled.

Margoni Grills and Iwate Charcoal are available on [Margoni's website](#)

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INTERVIEW



Japanese grills are ideal with all sorts of food



Iwate Charcoal is both efficient and beautiful

## Elections in Japan: The ruling party secured the upper house

On June 10, Japan has renewed one third of the seats in the House of Councilors, the country's upper house. The LDP (+6 seats) remains by far the largest party with 118 seats out of 248 in total. With its allies, the LDP has secured a two-

thirds majority which is required to amend the Constitution. The Japanese Constitution has not been modified since it entered into effect in 1947. The two-thirds rule makes it extremely difficult to amend. It is indeed the oldest unamended con-

stitution in the world.

This “super-majority” was a key point of this election as some articles of the Constitution no longer seem in line with today's world.

動向

TREND

## JETRO Research: Energy transition and shortage risks in Europe

### 革新

INNOVATION

All European JETRO offices are currently conducting research on energy in Europe. The continent is planning to quit fossil energies, which must sharply decrease by 2030 already. Countries have adopted different strategies to achieve it. We could exchange our findings during a two-day workshop in Spain, one of the most advanced countries for renewable energy in Europe.

Regarding renewable energy, Spain has the largest potential in Europe. Most of its electricity is generated by wind farms. They can cover up to three quarters of the country's needs during the windy Spanish winter. The country can also count on solar panels that are especially effective during the summer.

One of the challenges is to stock this energy. The country is actively working on green hydrogen, which offers better performance for long-term storage and long-distance transport compared to batteries. The excess of electricity when the weather conditions are optimal can be used to produce hydrogen. The stock can be kept for months and used when needed.

The president of the Spanish Hydrogen Association explained that the cost per km between a thermic car and an hydrogen car is already in favour of the latter. Hydrogen also comes with obvious pros compared to EVs. The recharging time is only about 5 minutes, and the autonomy is larger for a much lighter weight. Investments are, howev-

er, necessary to develop the infrastructure and reduce the costs.

EVs are currently growing in popularity in Switzerland, but hydrogen trucks are tested for their better weight/power performance.

Switzerland already plays an interesting role at the centre of the continent with the natural storage capacity of the existing water dam.

However, the country has almost reached its maximal potential with hydropower. Furthermore, Switzerland aims to replace oil and gas which represented 58.8% of the total energy consumption in 2021 according to the [Federal Office for Energy](#).

A real challenge for sure.

## Assassination of former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe

### 動向

TREND

The upper house elections took place in a difficult context, as the country is still in shock following former Prime Minister Abe's assassination on July 8, 2022.

Mr Abe was Japan's longest serving Prime Minister until his resignation for health issues in 2020. He will remain one of the most influ-

ential men in modern Japan.

He was PM from Sept. 2006 to Sept. 2007 and from Dec. 2012 to Sept 2020.

He was killed during a meeting at the age of 67.

Violent crimes are extremely low in Japan.



*JETRO is a government-related organization that works to promote mutual trade and investment between Japan and the rest of the world. Originally established in 1958 to promote Japanese exports abroad, JETRO's core focus in the 21st century has shifted toward promoting foreign direct investment into Japan and helping small to medium size Japanese firms maximize their global export potential.*

*The JETRO Switzerland Newsletter can also be viewed and/or downloaded online: <http://www.jetro.go.jp/switzerland/newsletter>*

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