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Oishinbo: À La Carte, Vol. 5: Vegetables



Synopsis

R to L (Japanese Style). Weekly Time magazine sets up a series of culinary battles between the Tozai News's "Ultimate Menu," represented by Yamaoka, and the Teito Times's "Supreme Menu," represented by Kaibara Yuzan, Yamaoka's father and nemesis. The ingredient this time is vegetables, specifically cabbages and turnips. Who will win the Vegetable Showdown? Later, Yamaoka and Kurita help Tomii's son get over his hatred of eggplant, and patch a rift between lovers using the power of asparagus.

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Customer Reviews

The long running manga "Oishinbo" (which means "The Gourmet") is a popular best-selling manga series published by Shogakukan which has been ongoing since 1983. The series have sold 1.2 million copies per volume annually and have sold more than 100 million volumes as of Jan. 2009. Written by Tetsu Kariya and art by Akira Hanasaki, the series has won multiple awards and has had a successful anime TV series run from 1988 through 1992. And now the series is being released in the United States from Viz Media through their Viz Signature. Because there have been so many volumes, Viz has selected chapters from the popular manga and will separate each volume release by cuisine topic. So far the following manga have been released: * Oishinbo A la Carte - The making of food, beverages and utensils * Oishinbo - Sake * Oishinbo A la Carte - Ramen & Gyoza * Oishinbo A la Carte - Fish, Sushi and Sashimi "Oishinbo" revolves around the employees of the newspaper Tozai News with its employees commissioned to create the "Ultimate Menu", a model meal that embodies the pinnacle of Japanese cuisine. Both Shiro Yamaoka and Yuko Kurita

are in charge of the project and throughout each chapter, the series is broken down to several types of dishes or food related items and how each dish is created. Meanwhile, his father, who Shiro has had an estranged relationship for years after his mother's death, the world renown founder and director of prestigious Gourmet Club and Japanese pottery creator, Kaibara Yuzan heads the "Supreme Menu" for a rival newspaper. So, both Shiro and his father are known to butt heads many times. With Kaibara looking at his son as a person with a lacking knowledge of cuisine but Shiro, never to stand down against his father, proving that he knows more than his father thinks. The characters featured in "OISHINBO" are:

- Shiro Yamaoka - A journalist for Tozai News who knows his food and how things are created but he is estranged from his father, a prominent artist and founder and director of the Gourmet Club. He despises his father because of the death of his mother. Yamaoka was trained from a young age by his father, Kaibara.
- Kaibara Yuzan - The father of Shiro Yamaoka is a prominent artist and founder and director of the Gourmet Club. Because of his prominent stature, all restaurants fear him and thus feel the need to create perfect food for him. Estranged from his son Shiro and despises him for destroying all of his paintings and pottery worth tens or hundreds of million yen. A man widely revered for his sense of taste and feared for his ferocious temper. He heads the "Supreme Menu" project for Teito Times, rival paper to the Tozai News that his son works for.
- Yuko Kurita - Knowledgeable about food and partner of Shiro. She learns a lot from him.
- Daizo Ohara - Publisher of Tozai News
- Hideo Tanimura - Director of Tozai News Art & Culture Department
- Tomio Tomii - Deputy Director working under Tanimura
- Tojin Toyama - A legendary ceramicist and gourmet
- Mantaro Kyogoku - A wealthy businessman and gourmet
- Seiichi Okaboshi - Chef/owner of a sushi shop and Shiro's local hangout
- Tokuo Nakugawa - The head chef for Gourmet Club

For this latest volume of "OISHINBO A la Carte", the stories are broken up in chapters that relate to vegetables. Here is a spoiler-less summary of each chapter:

1. Recipe: Asparagus with Walnut Dressing and Asparagus Grilled Kobayaki-style
2. FIRST COURSE - Vegetable Showdown! (Part One) - Kaibara challenges Shiro in a vegetable contest of who can make the best cabbage and radish dish.
3. FIRST COURSE - Vegetable Showdown! (Part Two) - The second part of the cabbage and radish competition.
4. FIRST COURSE - Vegetable Showdown! (Part Three) - The final part of the cabbage and radish competition.
5. SECOND COURSE - The Joy of a New Potato - The gang try to help out a President of the Misaki Group who's life is thrown upside down due to failures in the real estate market.
6. Oishinbo Day-by-Day - Tetsuya Kariya rights about the connection between hotspots and vegetables.
7. THIRD COURSE - The Bean Sprout Kid - A child who is fatherless is teased by other kids and called a bean sprout and Shiro who feels bad for the kid, decides to help him.
8. FOURTH COURSE - Good Eggplant,

Bad Eggplant - Tomii Tomio's son Hitoshi and Inspector Nakamatsu both dislike eggplant and Shiro decides to show them that eggplant can be delicious. 9. FIFTH COURSE - The Story of Vegetables, Now and Then - When Uda Yoshio (a famous author and gourmet) and Mizukawa Yoriko (an environmental specialist) butt heads on the environment, the two are at odds with each other. 10. SIXTH COURSE - The Breath of Spring - Former couple Ikuta Shoko and popular ceramic builder Yoshino Koichi meet up with each other many years later and both see how her passion for food and his passion for ceramics work great with each other. 11. SEVENTH COURSE - A Suprising Taste (Part One) - Zento Motors needs land owned by Kyogoku-san but in order to win him over, it must be by a good dish. So, Zento Motors asks for Shiro's help. 12. SEVENTH COURSE - A Suprising Taste (Part Two) - The second part as the President of Zento Motors (with Shiro's help) must please Kyogoku-san with a dish. 13. EIGHTH COURSE - The Taste of Chicken, The Taste of Carrots - A story about the benefits of organic vegetables vs. vegetables that were raised with pesticides.

JUDGMENT CALL: Also, included at the end of the main chapters is a "Notes on the Text" which explains certain panels and meaning of certain Japanese words. I absolutely love "OISHINBO A la Carte". Any fans of Japanese cuisine can also read this manga and just be amazed of how enjoyable, how witty, how smart each story is written. Not only are the readers engrossed by the characters, especially the rivalry between Shiro and his father Kaibara Yuzan, you really learn about the Japanese perspective of cuisine and also preparation. With "OISHINBO A la Carte - Vegetables", this latest volume is probably the most debatable as stories focus on vegetables that were grown fresh (organic) and vegetables grown with the use of pesticides. The stories tend to showcase the perspectives of both who support each side but in the end, the author's feelings and passion towards organic vegetables is definitely evident in this latest volume. For the most part, the articles do cover various vegetables and each chapter is quite enjoyable and fun to read. But some may find the organic vs. conventional (using pesticides) storylines a bit too preachy. Also, in this volume, we see interesting storylines that relate to Shiro and Yuko's relationship (or lack of one) but because the chapters do not go by order of manga release but selected chapters, those who want to read a more connected storyline (when it comes to their relationship) will not find it. As one chapter focuses on his lack of attention to her, another chapter on the romantic rival for Yuko's affection and then next thing you know, another chapter featuring the two as a married couple. So, as much as I would love to read of how their relationship develops, but unfortunately, due to the large number of "Oishinbo" chapters, we're probably not going to see that in the US for now. But aside from the small quirks I had in this latest volume, it's still another enjoyable release of "Oishinbo A la Carte". I absolutely enjoyed the vegetable competitions but also

indirect recipes of how to prepare certain vegetables, which was very fun to read and wouldn't mind trying it out the recipes at home. But overall, each volume of "OISHINBO A la Carte" has been magnificent and just an enjoyable manga series. I don't think there have been one chapter in any of the volumes that I found boring or not worth reading. Definitely recommended!

It was interesting to see the Japanese perspective on some common vegetable. There is a vegetable battle between Shiro and Kaibara Yuuzan. It is Shiro's opinion that all organic vegetable are the only ones that have any flavor and beyond that can heal the sick and cure people's distaste/allergy to vegetables and that non-organic products are a symptom of the downfall of society. I found that message a bit cloying, which made reading a bit less enjoyable than some of the other volumes. The series itself is unique as far as I know and it's rare to see something like this translated. I recommend getting the first volume or two, especially the 'Sake' one which was my favorite.

Another in the manga series on Japanese cooking. This time vegetables get the treatment. In addition to following the adventures of the hero, you'll get advice on selecting eggplant, roasting potatoes with salt and other Japanese methods. If you're interested in Japanese culture or Japanese food, this is a good series

Even though this series is written in the manga style, I learn something new about the history of Japanese cuisine with every volume. There are even 1 or 2 recipes included at the end of each book. Even read in order, the back story of the individual characters is still a bit disjointed and hard to follow. The back stories are not that closely interwoven into the culinary stories, so character development comes in second to food. So, if you are looking for a manga story with food thrown in, try elsewhere. If you want to know more about how the Japanese developed their cuisine and a bit of their food culture, this short series may do just fine.

"Oishinbo" is a long-running Japanese manga series. It started in 1983 and, as far as I know, new chapters are still being produced. Instead of bringing the 110+ volume series to America directly, Viz decided to an *À la carte* version that instead focused on the highlights. Each book focuses on a different type of food, from rice to fish to the star of this volume, the humble vegetable. The Tozai News has commissioned the creation of an *Ultimate Menu* embodying the soul of Japanese cuisine to celebrate its 100th anniversary. Reporter Yamaoka

Shiro is responsible for creating this august list with help from his friends and the Tozai News staff. Each episode focuses on a different ingredient or aspect of cuisine, with an emphasis on fresh, organic vegetables and quality ingredients. It's a little difficult to determine the overarching plot in this series of excerpts. It's obvious that great spans of time have elapsed and large chunks of the story are gone. In one chapter, Yamaoka's pretty partner Kurita Yuko laments that he hasn't noticed her interest in him; in the next chapter, she's his wife but each chapter tends to have a self-contained story that is pretty easy to follow. In one chapter, for example, a boy is being bullied at school, but through a cooking lesson he's able to win his classmates' hearts. In another, a wealthy man suddenly loses his fortune, and the reporters help him rediscover the simpler life. The tales are heartwarming and sweet. Even though I don't know what exactly is going on, plotwise, the characters are all very distinctive. Yamaoka is rather lazy, a genius when it comes to food but oblivious to much of the world around him. Kurita is sweet, patient, and kind. All traits desperately needed when dealing with the difficult Yamaoka. The staff of the newspaper has all the stereotypical characters: an overbearing boss, a flirtatious beauty, and a somewhat geeky supervisor, but they're all depicted with such warmth and affection that the reader quickly grows fond of them, too. But the star of the series is obviously the food. The vegetables all look delicious, a tough trick in black and white drawings! The characters describe the food with such mouth-watering detail that it's easy to imagine exactly how it tastes. There's an educational aspect. The characters discuss different methods of preparation, and what to look for when purchasing fresh vegetables that makes the book delightful for foodies. I also enjoyed the cultural aspect of the dishes; many of the traits that the Japanese characters praise in their food aren't always important in the minds of American diners. Ultimately, this series makes me want to branch out of my comfort zone and try new vegetables, and check out the rest of the series, even though as a story the lack of cohesion bothered me.

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