

Café and Coffee Shop Tours in Kyoto #3

“Soirée”, founded in 1948, is a coffee shop known for its chic ambiance, softly illuminated by tasteful blue lighting. At the entrance, a sign beside the door bears a poem about the aroma of coffee, handwritten by the poet Count Isamu Yoshii, a close friend and frequent patron of the founder, seems to gently invite visitors inside. Many find themselves instinctively opening the door.



Jelly punch with five-colored jellies and made-in-Kobe soda; extra-thick butter toast with cinnamon sugar (two other variations available), shareable by two; and house-blend coffee.

Junko Shimoyama, the granddaughter of the founder, Kazuo Motoki, has been the shop’s third-generation owner for the past 10 years. She reminisces about him and says, “He used to give me stylish and rare toys made in France or other Western countries. He was such an awesome grandpa for a five-year-old.” However, he suddenly passed away, and her father, who was then a company employee, decided to take over the café, following the advice of those around him, who said it was a waste to close such a valuable shop.

Before opening Soirée, Kazuo ran an art gallery. Artists he befriended through work helped him with the café’s design and decorations. He deliberately chose not to play background music, as he felt that the conversations of customers were music enough.

The woodcarvings on the shop’s exterior and interior, as well as the furnishings, were created by Sadaharu Ikeno, Kazuo’s friend and a Nitten¹ sculptor. Ikeno drew inspiration from a rural church in France, where he had

studied art.

Junko guided us through the café’s many elaborate woodcarvings, including motifs such as “Grapes,” a symbol of abundance in Europe; “Bacchus,” the god of wine; and “Pan,” the god of pastures. One particularly striking piece depicts sunflowers, carved so intricately that even the backs of the flowers are carefully detailed, demonstrating remarkable craftsmanship.

Seiji Togo, a prominent painter in the 1900s and a member of the Nika Association², also contributed to Soirée’s décor. Introduced to the café by his friend Ryoza Sasaki, a painter of the same association, Togo later became a regular customer. His original illustrations appear on the shop’s coasters, tumblers, goblets, and coffee cups. If you order coffee on the first floor, it’s served in those specially designed original cups, which are also available on the Soirée online store.

The coffee at Soirée has a rich, full-bodied flavor, and it is also used to make the café’s jellies, one of its signature offerings. What began as simple jelly cubes served in milk or wine was later developed into the now-iconic “Jelly Punch” by the wife of

the second owner—Junko’s mother. Initially, the shop’s jelly desserts only used red jelly. Her mother added four new colors to make a five-colored jelly-and-milk treat to encourage Junko to drink milk, which she disliked. Then she substituted soda for milk, because its transparency enhanced the vibrant colors of the jelly. Last year marked the semicentennial anniversary of Jelly Punch.

Other jelly-based menu items include “Jelly Punch Float” and “Jelly Coffee Float,” both topped with ice cream, which creates a perfect harmony with jelly. Alcoholic beverages such as the highball are still a popular item, reflecting the nostalgic idea of a café as a place for adults to relax and unwind.

Among the shop’s 52 seats, the east-side seats on the second floor are particularly popular during cherry blossom season, as they offer a magnificent view of the blooming trees along the Takase River.

Soirée’s charm can also be enjoyed beyond the café itself through special events. Junko is planning to host one at Mitsukoshi Department Store in Nihonbashi, Tokyo, next March.

“This distinctive atmosphere of the shop is something I want to invite customers to enjoy. That is something I cherish as time goes by,” Junko says.

1. The Japan Fine Arts Exhibition, established in 1907.
2. One of Japan’s prestigious art associations.



Jelly Punch bag charm commemorating the item’s 50th anniversary



Café Soirée

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 TEL: 075-221-0351
 Website: <https://www.soiree-kyoto.com/>
 • Tue-Fri: Open from 1:00p.m. to 7:00p.m. (last order: 6:00p.m.)
 • Weekends/Holidays: Open from 1:00p.m. to 7:30p.m. (last order: 6:30p.m.)
 • Closed Mondays & Year-end holidays (December 29 to January 3)
 • Located 30 m from Exit 1-A at Kyoto Kawaramachi Station, Hankyu Railway / 200 m from Exits No. 4 & 5 at Gion Shijo Station, Keihan Railway

