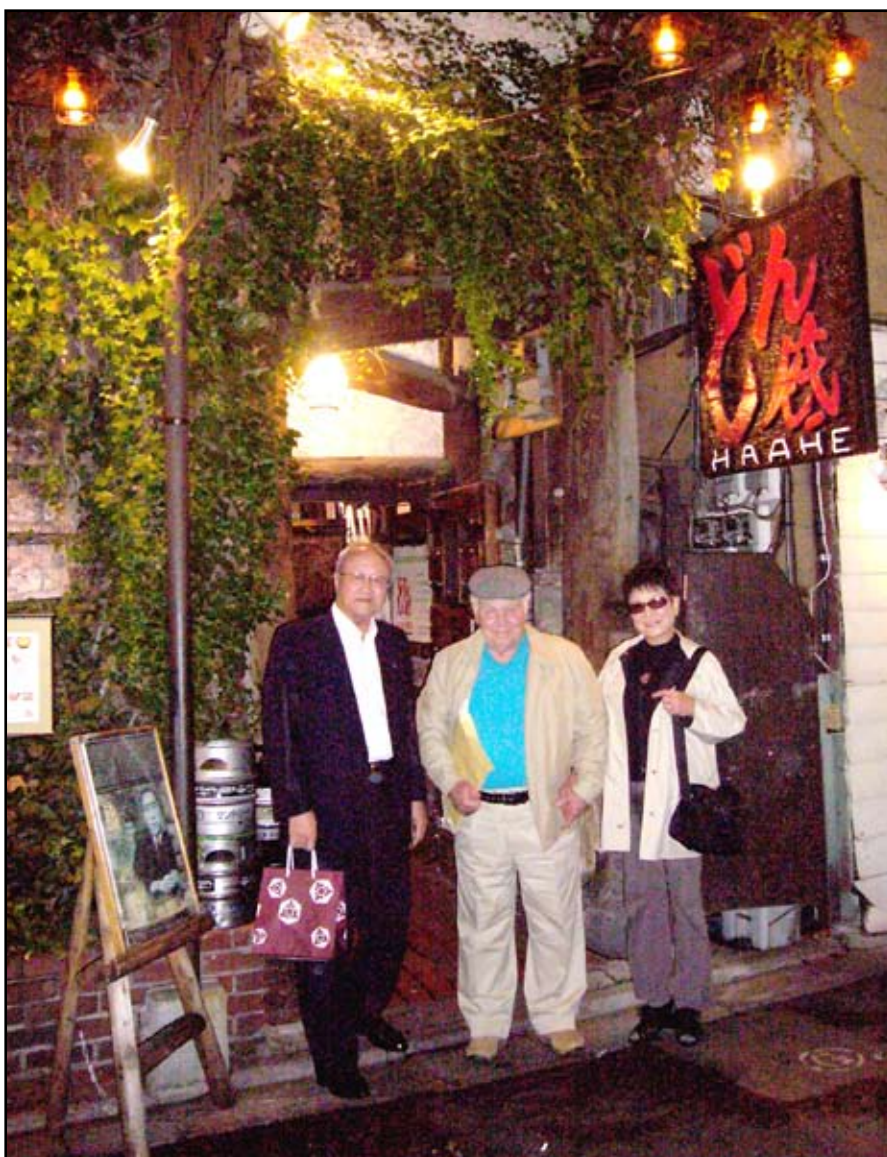




Shellfish

FOR us westerners, it's simple. A shellfish is any aquatic creature with a shell. Shrimp or oyster, crustacean or bivalve, it's still a shellfish. Japanese, however, make a linguistic distinction here. Crustaceans are *kōkakurui* and bivalves are *kai*. I didn't know this, so I was surprised at a small *kai* specialty shop in Tokyo's Shinjuku. By my unrefined definition, *kai* was simply shellfish, all kinds. I ate raw oysters and cooked abalone at the shop, then made the mistake of ordering fried shrimp. Yoshi and my good friend Masa Usami quickly educated me. Mollusks yes, crustaceans no. That's Masa squeezed between Yoshi and me at the long counter. He is a Japanese American who happened to be in Japan. After dinner, the three of us strolled a short distance to Donzoko, a famous bar and restaurant. Yoshi frequented the place with school chums in the 1950s. She remembers singing from a Russian song book provided by Donzoko. A placard at the entrance, seen in the photo at right, boasted of Yukio Mishima's patronage. This shouldn't surprise anyone. The



enfant terrible of Japanese literature hit all the hot spots. When I was bar-hopping in Roppongi, Shibuya and Shinjuku from 1958 to 1965, I often felt I was following Mishima around. I never met him, but he seemed to have been everywhere I went. How did he find the time to write all those books, dozens of them, including *Confessions of a Mask*, which made him rich and famous? Maybe he was like me in a single respect: Work hard in the daytime, play hard at night. Ah, youth! But I was never as narcissistic and psychotic as Mishima was. Never as talented either. I could have picked a typical author's photo to display here, the kind that portentously suggests a deep thinker, but I like this one, showing the brilliant writer and poet wearing a headband and little else, and brandishing a *samurai* sword. Mishima was a bodybuilder, a martial arts expert, and a disciple of *Bushidō*, the "Way of the Warrior" philosophy that died a hun-



dred years before he did. Japanese left-wingers hated him and were glad to get rid of him in 1970 when he was just 45 years old. A true believer to the end, Mishima stood on a balcony before a group of Japanese soldiers and called for a military *coup d'état*. In response to jeers from the soldiers, he withdrew and committed ritual suicide, as a failed *samurai* of yore would do. To be precise, he cut his belly with a dirk and an aide lopped off

his head with a sword. This was in 1970, mind you, not 1770. But hey, I digress. This little piece is supposed to be about a shellfish dinner followed by a brief visit to a popular tavern called Donzoko. We entered and grabbed a corner table. Masa snapped the picture below. The photo pinned to the wall near my head showed Japanese actresses sitting at Donzoko's cute bar. They were shooting a movie scene. Famed filmmaker Akira Kurosawa hoisted a few at Donzoko. Yoshi, below, is chatting with a waiter about coming here more than 50 years ago. The book in front of her illustrates Donzoko's history from 1951 to 2001. I paid ¥2,000 (now about \$22) for a souvenir copy and later scanned a painting of the tavern's façade. Featured was a fine Donzoko tribute by the late great Yukio Mishima. It's hard to ignore this guy. I asked Yoshi if she had read any of his books. "I have a couple," she said, "but I can't get into them. They are boring."



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