



Vincent Dromer and Keiko Tadokoro in their *patisserie* in Shiogama, Miyagi Prefecture

Vincent Dromer met his Japanese wife in Paris and set up a French *patisserie* in the city of Shiogama, Miyagi Prefecture. Having gone back to France temporarily following the earthquake, he has since returned to Shiogama in search of “true happiness.” Masaki Yamada reports.

Vincent Dromer was busy training to become a pastry chef in Paris in 2004 when he met Keiko Tadokoro, who was also training to be a baker in France at the time. They got married in 2005, the following year, and moved to Shiogama in 2009.

“Shiogama is a pretty town with a beautiful seaside

location, but it’s also close to my wife’s hometown of Sendai. That’s why we decided to live here,” explains Vincent. In April 2010, the couple took over an empty store in the city and opened a *patisserie* called Ringo no Ki (Apple Tree).

The cakes and confectionery that Dromer makes

are all seasoned with the very finest salt produced locally in Shiogama. There has been a thriving salt industry in Shiogama ever since the Heian period (794–1185).



Vincent Dromer at work in the Ringo no Ki kitchen

“I was looking for some sort of local ingredient to incorporate into my cakes, when one of the locals told me about Shiogama salt. Adding salt to cakes and confectionery brings out their sweetness and gives them a deeper flavor. It also helps to create a unique texture,” explains Dromer. Even the store’s popular choux cream puffs contain salt from Shiogama.

The city was hit by a tsunami measuring over two meters in the wake of the Great East Japan Earthquake. While countless homes were washed away, the Dromer’s store escaped any serious damage from the tsunami, apart from around 30 cm of floodwater. As French citizens were being advised to vacate the area however, Dromer headed back to Paris for a while with his family.

“My parents naturally assumed we wouldn’t be going back to Japan. They even started to look for an apartment for us in Paris. Two months later however

we decided to come back to Shiogama. I thought about what happiness means to me, and came to the conclusion that true happiness would be keeping the store running in Shiogama and bringing a little joy to the local community.”

They returned to Shiogama in May 2011 and reopened the store. Local residents thanked them for coming back. Some even sent flowers to celebrate the store reopening. The Dromers say they experienced no difficulties going about their daily lives at this time, or in finding the cooking ingredients they need for their business.

“I was delighted that reopening the store made so many people happy. I decided there and then that we would keep the store going for their sake,” says Dromer.

The store may only be big enough for three customers at a time, but it is full to bursting with fourteen different types of macaroon and around thirty traditional French cakes, and attracts as many local customers today as it did before the earthquake. 

Masaki Yamada is a freelance writer.



The Ringo no Ki pâtisserie in Shiogama, Miyagi Prefecture