

## **HL: Premium Soju. Bold Heritage. Refined Taste.**

***Deck: A brand that boasts a legacy and contemporary flair, HWAYO Soju is intent on offering consumers with a sophisticated sip steeped in heritage and innovation***

As Millennials and Gen Z continue to shape global consumption patterns, their curiosity and appetite for the new, the novel, and the authentic have led them to embrace a broader spectrum of drinking experiences. No longer happy with a single go-to beverage, today's consumers are exploring categories that offer both cultural depth and contemporary flair. Among these, soju—a traditional Korean rice-based spirit—has carved out a prominent spot, particularly in Western markets. Once a staple of Korean dining tables, soju has surged in popularity, riding the wave of global interest in Korean culture, from K-pop to cuisine.

Entering this scenario is HWAYO, a premium soju brand that redefines what the category can be. Bridging over 700 years of distillation heritage with modern refinement, HWAYO crafts a liquor that is as much about tradition as it is about innovation. From its elegant bottle design to its complex flavor profile and meticulous production methods—including low-temperature vacuum distillation and aging in traditional Onggi earthenware—HWAYO embodies the essence of Korean craftsmanship.

### **1.HWAYO takes inspiration from the word "soju" and emphasizes creating precious things from basic elements. Can you share more about the philosophy behind the brand and how it sets HWAYO apart from traditional soju?**

Hwayo is a premium spirits company founded on Kwangjuyo Group's vision of globalising Korean cuisine. Rooted in the philosophy of crafting the finest Korean liquor to complement beautifully designed ceramics and authentic Korean dining, Hwayo produces distilled soju using 100% domestically grown rice and pure, cultivated microorganisms, adhering to a strict no-additive principle. The name 'Hwayo' originates from a deconstruction of the Chinese character for soju (燒). "Hwa" (火) represents fire, while "Yo" (堯) signifies something noble and exalted. Further breaking down "Yo" (堯) reveals "To" (土), which symbolises Earth—a fundamental element alongside fire and water. This reflects Hwayo's core philosophy: to honour and refine the most essential elements in the pursuit of creating an exceptional and revered spirit.

### **2.HWAYO is deeply rooted in Korean heritage, from its name to its traditional Onggi maturation. How do you balance tradition with innovation in your products?**

HWAYO has established a smart, state-of-the-art factory, seamlessly integrating modern technology with traditional fermentation methods, including onggi (earthenware) aging. As the first in the spirits industry to fully automate its production process, HWAYO enhances efficiency and quality while preserving the authenticity of traditional craftsmanship. It is with this commitment to excellence that we are bringing Korea's finest distilled soju to the world.

**3.HWAYO contains no artificial additives. What challenges did you face in maintaining this natural purity while ensuring consistency in production?**

Hwayo is crafted using only 100% domestically grown rice and pristine water, without any artificial additives. Sourced directly from nature, it is these ingredients that ensure pure and authentic quality. Unlike traditional soju, which relies on nuruk—a fermentation starter—HWAYO uses specially cultivated microorganisms, resulting in a clean, smooth taste with a refined finish. Additionally, Hwayo employs vacuum distillation, which lowers the boiling point to reduce harsh flavours. This method eliminates the strong fermentation odours and bitter aftertaste found in conventional spirits, setting HWAYO apart from its competition, with its crisp and pure profile. To maintain consistency and excellence, Hwayo has implemented a fully automated smart factory system. From rice input to fermentation, distillation, aging and packaging, every step is meticulously monitored and controlled in real time. By eliminating production variables, HWAYO ensures a superior, consistently smooth spirit—every single time.

**4. HWAYO is the first liquor brand to implement a Smart HACCP system in Korea. Can you elaborate on how this system enhances quality control and product safety?**

Our smart HACCP (Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Points) is an advanced intelligent management system that integrates ICT (Information and Communication Technology) with conventional HACCP protocols. It automates the monitoring of critical control points and digitises documentation, enabling real-time data collection, management, and analysis for enhanced operational efficiency. By leveraging big data-driven process analysis and real-time hazard monitoring, Smart HACCP allows for swift risk response, reducing defect rates and ensuring consistent product quality and safety.

**5. Your rice comes from Yeosu, known for its premium rice quality. Can you tell us about your farming partnerships and how they contribute to sustainability and quality control?**

Since 2017, HWAYO has been engaged in contract farming with rice farmers in Eunbong-

ri, near our distillery. By utilising premium-quality Yeosu rice, H WAYO produces high-quality distilled soju, while this collaboration helps support the growth of Yeosu's agricultural industry and contributes to the local economy. Currently operating on a small scale, H WAYO aims to gradually expand this initiative to enhance the brand value of Yeosu rice and foster sustainable growth with local farmers.

## **6. Korean soju is gaining international recognition, but many people associate it with mainstream brands. How does H WAYO aim to redefine global perceptions of soju?**

In many international markets, green-bottle diluted soju is still widely recognised as Korea's representative liquor. However, H WAYO is more than just a spirits company—it is a cultural innovator dedicated to showcasing the value and excellence of Korean distilled soju. Rather than promoting a drinking culture centered on excessive consumption, we aim to pioneer a new global standard—one that embraces moderation, quality and appreciation. By reimagining how Korean soju is enjoyed, H WAYO is shaping a more refined and sophisticated drinking experience worldwide.

## **7. What are some marketing initiatives H WAYO has taken up to expand their reach in the western market?**

In the Asian market, we introduce our products in ways that resonate with local consumers, seamlessly integrating H WAYO into their drinking culture and making it a natural part of their lifestyle. We've hosted Guest Shift Bartending events at top bars in Singapore, featuring internationally acclaimed bartenders; showcased H WAYO cocktails designed to harmonise with the region's food culture; organized cocktail classes and parties at popular bars in high-traffic areas, driving strong consumer engagement.

Furthermore, in the U.S. market we've hosted brand launch dinners and events for celebrities, industry professionals and consumers. We invited journalists to distribute press releases and encouraged attendees to share their experiences on social media, creating a strategy for organic brand exposure. We also developed a website to introduce the brand to consumers who were unfamiliar with the brand, ensuring increased visibility and product awareness. Add to the mix branded promotional materials such as eco-bags, shirts, hats, and bandanas, which were distributed to attendees. This allowed them to naturally incorporate the brand into their daily lives, increasing brand exposure as they wore or used these items in public.

## **8. The H WAYO bottle is inspired by the 12th-century Goryeo celadon. What was the design process like, and how does the aesthetic reflect the brand's identity?**

Hwayo has been elegantly reinterpreted with a modern touch, drawing inspiration from the refined simplicity of Goryeo-era iron-painted celadon, such as the "Celadon Cylindrical Bottle with Iron-Painted Willow Design" and the "Celadon Cylindrical Bottle with Iron-Painted Willow Pattern." The opaque white bottle symbolises rice, the key ingredient of Hwayo and a classic element of Korean culinary culture. The sleek black bottle enhances the depth and smoothness of the spirit, adding a sense of prestige. Both bottles are adorned with the Crane symbol in relief, a signature motif of Kwangjuyo—Hwayo's parent company—further elevating their aesthetic sophistication. Additionally, the Hwayo calligraphy logo captures the essence of Korean craftsmanship. Inspired by the image of a sage enjoying a drink atop a secluded

mountain rock, the logo was designed by renowned calligrapher Kang Byung-in, embodying the beauty of Hangeul and the identity of Korean traditional liquor. Every aspect of HWAYO, from the bottle shape to the logo design, has been carefully curated on the basis of thorough research and dedication to preserve and express the true identity of Korean spirits.

**9. What new innovations or products can we expect from HWAYO in the coming years? Are there plans to experiment with new aging techniques or different grain sources?**

HWAYO aims to become a leading integrated spirits company. With the recent expansion of its second factory, which is equipped with facilities for producing RTD (Ready-to-Drink) beverages, Hwayo is accelerating its efforts in developing a diverse range of spirits and products. While at the moment we are unable to give out more information about what's in our pipeline, definitely stay tuned to know about all the exciting developments we will soon be rolling out in the market.