

# PortlandTribune

## Bread & Butter • Food for thought at Bamboo Sushi

BY ANNE MARIE DISTEFANO

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### Before I tell you anything else about Bamboo Sushi, I'm going to tell you to do this:

Take a bite of kanpachi nigiri. Then take a sip of White Crane sake. You'll want to stand up and applaud.

Kanpachi, also known more prosaically as amberjack, has a fine, elegant texture and a delicate flavor. The sake is pure and subtle, like soft spring water, only better. Together they create a sensation that is what I think of as a Japanese ideal: simple, artful, natural, balanced.

Not everything at Bamboo is this great, and at the beginning of the meal, the menu's possibilities are in danger of being drowned in verbiage. That's because Bamboo bills itself as the world's first certified sustainable sushi restaurant, and certification, in the world of seafood, is extremely complex.

Color coding and little icons on the menu indicate which seafood has the seal of the Marine Stewardship Council. The restaurant also displays the stamps of the Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch, the Blue Ocean Institute, Salmon Nation and KidSafe Seafood, and paper tents on each table offer details on these various programs.

When I told my date we were headed for a sustainable sushi restaurant, his first question was, "Do they use brown rice?"

No, thank God, they do not. They offer a list of traditional nigiri (fish on rice) and familiar rolls such as the California roll, spicy tuna roll, and spider roll. Vegetarians are accommodated with avocado nigiri and a number of rolls containing things like pickled gourd, tempura asparagus, and marinated tofu. You can also get noodle soup, tempura, a number of seafood entrees, or a Kobe beef burger.

We start with a plate of pickled vegetables, which offers impressive variety, although only the purple, peppery eggplant really stands out for flavor. Meanwhile we're grappling with a graduate-level sake list. There are 18 sakes here, almost all available by the glass or bottle. They're organized according to "polish," that is, the percentage of the rice grain that remains to be made into sake after the outer husk is polished away. But we're such beginners that, at first, we think the sake is Polish.

Fortunately, these sakes have beautiful, evocative names like Sword, Depth, Crane of Kasumi, Cabin in the Snow, and Demon Killer to help with the selection process. Each one also has tasting notes, like a wine list, and my White Crane is every bit as light, floral, clean and dry as the notes promise.

Bamboo's owner is 26-year-old Kristofor Lofgren, who, working with chef Brandon Hill, has created a rigorously researched list of fish that satisfies his criteria for sustainability. Lofgren hasn't hesitated to keep certain sushi standards off the menu. You won't find bluefin tuna (toro), snapper, freshwater eel, or octopus here.

What you will find is wild Alaskan salmon, with a taste and texture quite different from the ubiquitous farmed salmon. Wild salmon is less slick — a result, says Lofgren, of the fact that wild salmon has a more diverse diet and stronger muscles from swimming free. Its flavor is simply more salmon-y. At \$5 for two



Bamboo Sushi bills itself as the world's first certified sustainable sushi restaurant. Customers can enjoy freshly prepared sushi dishes like (clockwise from front) usuzukuri, nigiri kanpachi and California sunset roll.  
L.E. BASKOW / TRIBUNE PHOTO

pieces, wild is also more expensive than farmed.

Bamboo isn't the cheapest sushi joint in town, but it's not the most expensive, either. And you can keep your bill from skyrocketing by avoiding the Salmon Nation Roll, which costs \$17. It's got smoked salmon, asparagus and avocado rolled together, topped with a "salsa" of salmon and salmon skin, and it's too much. The ingredients compete rather than work together.

Everything else I tried was as good or better than the sushi at my favorite neighborhood spots. And all of it comes without the nagging feeling that I usually experience when I'm eating sushi. The world's wild fish supply is severely overstrained, and much of the farmed seafood in the world is raised in ways that do more harm than good.

Like organic produce, certified sustainable seafood tends to be better than its undocumented counterpart — fresher, brighter, more flavorful. And it tastes even better because it doesn't come with a garnish of guilt.

*Bamboo Sushi, 5 p.m. to 10 p.m. daily, 310 S.E. 28th Ave., 503-232-5255, [www.bamboosushi.pdx.com](http://www.bamboosushi.pdx.com)*

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The United States Barista Championship, which takes place in a different city every year, is coming to Portland March 5-8. The feats of espresso-making prowess that are spread over the three days are open to the public and admission is free. Competitors from Portland include the Northwest regional champ, Alex Pond of the Fresh Pot, and second place winner, Kevin Fuller of Albina Press.

*See [www.usbc2009.com](http://www.usbc2009.com) for details.*

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Tickets for the 22nd annual Taste of the Nation extravaganza are now on sale. The nonprofit Share Our Strength puts on this regional showcase of food and drink every year as a fundraiser to fight hunger. No, not just the hunger of attendees, although if you go to this high-end food fair, you will leave stuffed to the gills. The proceeds go to several organizations that provide food for those on the wrong side of the poverty line.

Local chefs take Taste of the Nation seriously. You'll see many of them in person, answering questions and dishing out canapés, tiny cups of soup and all kinds of specially-made samples. It's a frenzy of oysters, salmon, charcuterie, cheese, cupcakes, wine, and beer, and serves as a primer of what's happening in Portland's ever-changing edible landscape.

The event isn't until April 27, but it's not too early to ensure your place at the banquet.

Tickets are \$75 to \$200 at [www.portlandtaste.org](http://www.portlandtaste.org) or by calling 1-877-268-2783

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