

Entertainment: Dining Impact - OregonLive.com

Restaurant review: Bamboo Sushi

Posted by David Sarasohn, The Oregonian January 20, 2009 14:25PM

Most restaurants don't even have slogans, and when they do, it's something like "World's Greatest Stuffed Eggplant" or "Half Off Tuesdays." So it's striking to see a restaurant that proclaims "Sustainable. Delectable. Possible."

It's even more striking when the first is backed up on the menu and the second is frequently true. As for the third ... at how many sushi places can you strongly recommend the burger?

All kinds of things are possible at [Bamboo Sushi](#), the inspiration of 26-year-old Kristofor Lofgren, previously co-founder of Masu East on the same premises. Bamboo Sushi claims to be the first independent restaurant certified by the Marine Stewardship Council, and its menu is speckled with little MSC marks of approval. (You also get a little Monterey Bay Aquarium pamphlet with your check, which may be a little late.)

But the restaurant's sustainability may ultimately rest on its creativity and skill. Going the distance with things like seasonal sakes and occasional crab flights doesn't hurt, either.

Under the sushi supervision of Brandon Hill, also from Masu East, the House Signature Rolls are intricate arrangements of vividly fresh fish and artful layerings of textures. Salmon Nation Roll -- some sake helps you feel comfortable saying the names -- has a core of smoked ivory salmon and asparagus, with crispness from cucumber and richness from avocado, with salmon and -- yes! -- salmon skin salsa over the top. It's a mouth-filling, not to say sustainable, arrangement.

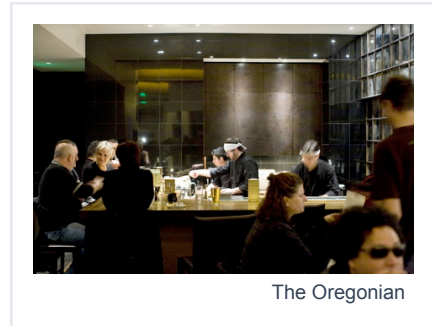
Chasing the Dragon produces a similarly sensation-crowded experience, with shrimp tempura, spicy tuna and red crab, rolled in tempura bits that provide a convoy of crunch. Highway 35 also flashes Bamboo Sushi's taste for unexpected minglings: A core of red crab with spicy sesame aioli is topped with sake poached pears -- sweet against spice and richness.

Sushi basics are just as good, matching quality of fish with the sustainability ethos. High demand has made tuna an embattled (not to say rancher) fish these days, but Bamboo Sushi has been offering albacore line-caught from the Philippines, cleanly and meltingly fresh. Its core crab is eastern red, but it also offers, when available, Canadian snow crab, Dungeness and Florida stone. (Lofgren says he works with fishermen who catch crab for Bamboo Sushi, then fed ex it to the restaurant the next day.)

You'll also find hot dishes that even unsustainable sushi bars can't manage. Tempura is impressively crisp and greaseless. Seared scallops with ponzu brown butter may not astonish, but they're silky and sweet. Best is gently grilled black cod in smoked soy with sweet grilled garlic bits -- a delicate fish strikingly surrounded by pungency. Then there is the splendid burger, American kobe beef on a home-made brioche bun. Like the sushi rolls, it is also carefully topped, with onions that the menu calls "caramelized" but that look more like tempura.

The cross-cultural ambition proceeds with grilled flank steak and brisket with black bean barbecue sauce, but neither quite so mind-opening as other dishes.

Bamboo Sushi's beyond-sushi ambitions extend to dessert, and making its own perfectly respectable ice creams. (The most interesting is a sweet potato-lime sorbet, which could redefine Thanksgiving.) It also has a lovely, intense flourless chocolate cake and chocolate egg rolls -- deep-fried egg roll skins filled with melted dark chocolate -- which fall into the category of Should Try Once.



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Albacore sashimi with shitake mushrooms

The restaurant is very attractive, making the most of the standard Japanese restaurant blond wood motif, especially in its wood-and-mirror bar area, where people seem happy to wait and sample sake in ranges of fruitiness and dryness, and sweetish milky versions. Beyond that, like so many new restaurants, it offers its own cocktail list, notably a must-be-nourishing pear gimlet.

Very few dishes on the menu top \$15, although with sushi, of course, things can add up quickly. Still, two people should stay happily under \$100, and the engaging servers can help.

With its triple objectives, Bamboo Sushi sets itself a daunting goal, and generally reaches it. Its menu sustains not only the oceans but an evening and a mood, and repeatedly injects a layer of surprise between the fish and the rice.

For a sushi bar, it cooks.

Could Bamboo Sushi be one of the most intriguing restaurants to open in Portland in a while?

It's possible.

Summing up:

Grade: A-

Cuisine and scene: The country's first certified sustainable sushi bar sustains an impressively creative menu and a lively, sake-scented bar scene.

Recommended: Sushi rolls, notably Salmon Nation, Highway 35 and Chasing the Dragon; black cod with smoked soy and roasted garlic; Kobe beef burger; flourless chocolate cake.

Vegetarian friendly? Several salads, vegetable sushi rolls and, of course, tofu.

Sound level: As with everything else here, sustainable.

Beverages: Extensive sake list, with seasonal options and three-sample flights; intriguing cocktail list, limited wines and beers.

Price range: Sushi rolls, \$4-\$17; specialty plates, \$9-\$25; hot dishes, \$6-\$13; desserts, \$3-\$9.

Extras: Reservations for 7 or more only; major credit cards; street parking; disabled access.

Serving: Dinner nightly; Happy Hour 5-6:30 p.m. Mon-Fri (five sushi rolls, five hot dishes discounted)

Info: 310 S.E. 28th Ave.; 503-232-5255

