For the love of sushi

By Bettina Marks

Sushi is an art form. It is a visually exciting and extremely sensual delicacy for the palate. When you combine the creative culinary craft that highly trained sushi chefs demonstrate with the business acumen and expertise of someone who knows how to select the best fish, you get good sushi.

Ryusaburo Kawada, aka "Robin," for those of you who aren't fluent in Japanese, is a man with both culinary history and years of expertise as an importer/exporter of fish from all over the world, and really knows his fish. He was one of the first Japanese restaurateurs to introduce Japanese food to Americans in 1974. He opened Kurama at 11 East 48th Street that first catered to the Japanese American business lunch crowd and received three stars from Zagat on a yearly basis. They opened, serving only sushi and sashimi and only later introduced hot dishes like teriyaki and other favorites like tempura that were more popular with the more timid Americans.

Since 1975 he has supplied over 120 restaurants with the highest quality fish for sushi and prepared dishes. The sea urchin is imported from Japan as is the tofu. The lobster from Maine, blue crab from Maryland and of course, the salmon is from Alaska.

Kawada has owned and operated this establishment for the last two years and along with the chef, Taka Yama. Two happy patrons sang his praises to me as I entered the rather modestly decorated restaurant the other night to begin my meal with the bean sprout salad appetizer. The imported tofu, of a soft and supple, yet substantial consistency, was quite flavorful and arrived shortly thereafter graced with chopped scallions and drizzled with a light teriyaki sauce.

An order of cold sake was just the right drink to complement what followed. The spicy tuna salad with chopped tuna on a mesculin and red leaf lettuce bed was surrounded by larger thinly sliced pieces of tuna and was sprinkled with chopped scallions which were all mixed together into a spicy vinaigrette dressing. Absolutely fabulous!

The spider roll came at our request, but a potpourri of specialties — some which I had never sampled before — followed, including Kampachi (a type of yellowtail, that was extremely tender and tasty), Ishidai (a type of grouper) that was also quite delectable, Shimaji (a red snapper-like savory substance), a rare treat for even the most experienced sushi connoisseur, and the White Tuna albacore, another exotic find.

Kawada gave me quite an education about the freshness of fish.

"Soft is not always fresh," he explained. "Tuna is better tasting after two days when the amino acids are released. Fluke is better served after one or two days out of the water."

So, for those of you adventurous fishermen and boaters who think that you can eat sashimi right on the boat, Kawada warns that you may be disappointed.

The specialty rolls that followed were named after his patrons in order to satisfy his customers' tastes. The two we sampled were the "Michelle" and the "Finisto Baby." The "Michelle" is a spicy yellowtail roll with chopped tuna, scallion, crunchy tempura bits and green salmon roe sprinkled on the outside. This was a beautifully designed and quite tasty creation. The "Finisto Baby" is filled with spicy tuna and shrimp tempura on the inside with yellowtail, crunchy tempura bits, scallion and fish eggs dusting the outside.

In addition to the "homage" sushi, we were served a fatty tuna roll with avocado and green salmon roe and the lowest fat roll of the meal: the cucumber roll. For those who don't want any carbs, this roll uses cucumber to substitute for rice on the outside of the roll and contains tuna, salmon and crabmeat artfully arranged in what looks like a cross between a yin yang and spiral design. It was very satisfying and was the healthiest, lowest fat bite of the entire meal. It promises not to add any weight, anywhere.

Just then the tease of the red bean and green tea ice cream arrived. It was so good that I wasn't able to have just a "taste." Before I knew it, the bowl was empty!

Takesushi
The Sushi Restaurant
1035 Broadway, Woodmere
569-3606

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