



STEVE FECHT/staff photographer

Chef Yamamoto displays sushi he has prepared at Kyotosushi, newly opened Japanese restaurant and sushi bar, at the Kyoto in Dearborn. Kyoto also has Japanese restaurants and sushi bars in Troy and downtown Detroit and is opening a fourth one soon in Novi. The mainstay of sushi bars is raw fish served with vinegared rice, but cooked fish and other items also are available. At home, you can try do-it-yourself sushi. Japanese characters to right of photo read "sushi bar."

Most of the sushi items at Kyoto are composed of a small piece of seafood, sculpted rice, wasabi (very potent Japanese horseradish) and nori (pressed seaweed).



Tempura is light as gauzy gown

When I set out to do a story, especially a piece on something as unfamiliar as tempura, I begin by searching out cookbooks that I have. Then I go to the old file cabinet in the basement for musty folders filled with recipes and clippings from old newspapers of years past. If need be, I head for the library.

Every now and then, I stumble on a ratty old piece of paper or, in this case, a bar napkin scribbled with a name and number and the notation "tempura" in bold letters. It has been years since I last talked to the "Oriental tempura queen" herself, Lauretta Helise. As a matter of fact, the last time we met, she was making Peking duck and proceeded to use a bicycle tire pump to begin the ritual of blowing up the duck. A quick call to the number connected me not only with the information I needed but included recipes that are intertwined with folklore, nostalgia and, in Lauretta's case, a great sense of humor.

Seems like the tempura queen has since landed a position as a graphic artist for ANR Pipeline and has temporarily shelved her wok and cleaver for a paintbrush and canvas. The culinary market has lost, but ANR has gained. What started as a short phone

chef
Larry
Janes



conversation turned into dinner at my place with tales and stories — all about tempura. The term tempura is Japanese and broken down means tem — heaven, pu — woman, ra — silken gauze. The ancient translation actually means, "Wearing a gossamer crust of batter as a woman wears silk gauze, stimulating the desire of the beholder by glimpses of the beauty beneath." To coin a phrase from the retired Oriental chef's mouth, "Tempura batter should just barely kiss the food."

MOST OF US are used to the deep-fried planks of food so readily served in today's fast-food eateries. Sometimes the batter is sooo thick, you might not know if you were eating chicken, fish or whatever. Tempura batter, on the other hand, is soft, airy, and as your teeth sink through the crun-

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By Robert Strika
special writer

The chef begins the preparation of your sushi by reaching for the chunk of red tuna and slicing through it as if it were air. With a flick of the blade, a triangular piece appears. Separated from the larger piece and arranged in a circle, these thin pieces of meat are the petals of a sushi "flower" that is blossoming before your eyes.

Sushi, put simply, is raw fish with rice. (The word sushi actually means vinegared rice.) Humans have been eating raw fish since their appearance on earth thousands of years ago, but it wasn't until about 200 years ago that they began to eat it along with rice. In the last 50 years, sushi has grown from a basic dietary filler to an art form. High in protein, it is also very nutritious.

This art form is practiced by an increasing number of chefs in the United States, mostly Japanese, who use basic preparation techniques and ultra-expressive presentations to create a veritable feast for the senses.

Chef Yamamoto, from the Kyotosushi restaurant and sushi bar inside the Kyoto Japanese steak house in Dearborn, is one of these talented people. Born, coincidentally, in Kyoto, Japan, Yamamoto has the seasoning and professionalism of a chef many years his senior. He is 31.

His hands moving with a precision resembling that of a magician or surgeon, the chef continues to assemble the sushi. The ingredients explode on the plate like fireworks, each one brighter

Raw truth about sushi

than the last. The whole scene attacks your senses. Your eyes begin to taste the chef's creation.

"I began to cook at the age of 17 mainly because I like to eat," explained Yamamoto, through the aid of an interpreter. "Now it is a way of life."

Yamamoto has a theory on why sushi is becoming more popular in the Midwest. He reasons that Japanese business people come to these areas for the automotive and electronic industries and bring with them the bits of their culture that make them feel at home.

"This is why we see sushi bars, or shops as we call them in Japan, popping up all over the West Coast. They are there because the Japanese people are settling there," he said. "Now, because the Japanese auto market is situated around the Michigan, Ohio and Tennessee areas, we find sushi shops multiplying in these areas as well."

Only a few moments have passed while the young chef has applied his craft, and now he turns the plate around and presents it to you for consumption. Mixed emotions overcome you as you resist the urge to dig in, preferring instead to admire this work of art.

Most of the sushi items at Kyoto are composed of a small piece of seafood, sculpted rice, wasabi (very potent Japanese horseradish) and nori (pressed seaweed). The seafood is placed on or in the sculpted rice and wasabi and either tied or rolled with the nori. The customer may then dip the sushi in soy sauce or add more wasabi to his or her liking.

'Do-It-Yourself Sushi'

SALMON SUSHI LOGS

fresh salmon, cut into strips about as thick as a pencil
1 package of nori (pressed seaweed)
2-3 cups cooked kohabo rice (available in Japanese specialty stores) and prepared like regular long-grain rice except you use 2% cups of water to 1 cup of rice
1 small jar of wasabi (potent Japanese horseradish)
soy sauce
1 razor-sharp knife

Make sure rice is completely cooled before assembling sushi. Place a sheet of nori on bamboo rolling mat. Spread a small amount of wasabi on the nori and then a layer of rice leaving 1/4 inch clean on all

The menu from the Kyotosushi bar reads like an encyclopedia of seafoods. With everything from abalone to yellowtail maki, the seafood connoisseur can have a field day. There's octopus, squid, eel, sea urchin, salmon, shad, and the most popular red tuna and shrimp, to name a few. Each seafood has its own individual presentation when combined with the rice and nori. At Kyotosushi, you may also have your seafood cooked, and there is a full Japanese menu to accompany the sushi.

Customers who just want to eat sushi may check off the items they want on a prepared list of seafoods and combinations, which includes

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four sides. Place the seafood strips about 1 1/4 inches away from the bottom side of the nori and on top of the rice. Using the bamboo mat for support, roll the ingredients into a log, making it tighter by pressing the bamboo mat into the log shape. With a very sharp knife, saw the logs into 1 1/4 inch pieces and stand them rice side up on a plate. Dunk the sushi into a small bowl of soy sauce.

Note: A variety of seafoods including shrimp, abalone, shad, sea urchin and tuna also will work well with this recipe. Thinly sliced, cooked carrots, red or green peppers or other vegetables may be placed inside the sushi for color and variation.

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