

DINING

Chefs practice art of sushi

BY ELEANOR HEALD
SPECIAL WRITER

Sushi and sashimi art came to Birmingham early this month. No opening jitters since co-proprietors and sushi chefs Chris Sayanthone and Richard Supadi have operated an establishment with the same name, Tokyo Sushi & Grill, in Troy since July 1998.

However, the two locations are not cookie cutters. The layout of both eateries is completely different. More Asian in Troy, upbeat with a downtown feel in soothing green, blue and pink in Birmingham. Only five seats are available at the sushi bar. The remaining, for a total of 50, are at tables of two which can easily be pulled together to service larger groups.

Appetizer choices are also slightly different and donburi is new in Birmingham. Sayanthone describes donburi as "something such as chicken, beef or tempura on top of rice." If you like tonkatsu, deep-fried breaded pork cutlet, you can get that too by ordering Katsu Don.

Specialty

A Tokyo, Japan, specialty is Chirachi Sushi, a combination of seafood over rice with pickles, pickled ginger, wasabi and a

Tokyo Sushi & Grill
Where: 225 E. Maple, Birmingham (248) 258-6501
Open: 11 a.m. to 10 p.m., Monday-Thursday; until 11 p.m., Friday-Saturday; 3-9 p.m., Sunday
Menu: Sushi and sashimi bar, noodle dishes, donburi, teriyaki, tempura and katsu. All items available as carry-out
Cost: Lunch average \$8; dinner average \$12
Reservations: Accepted
Other location: 30 W. Square Lake, Troy (248) 828-0090

smelt roll. It is the Birmingham location's lunch and dinner specialty at a moderate \$9.95.

Soft noodle dishes, either udon (rice flour) or soba (buckwheat flour) at Tokyo Sushi make the ideal accompaniment to round out a meal of sushi and sashimi or both. Yaki Soba are pan-fried noodles with bacon, shrimp and vegetables. Yaki Udon has pan-fried noodles with chicken and vegetables.

If you are not yet a sushi aficionado, but want to give it a try, the top sellers at Tokyo Sushi are salmon, followed in order by tuna, yellowtail and eel. If you're somewhat experienced, then

head straight for the "Authentic Japanese" portion of the sushi menu. Smelt roe, sea urchin and salmon roe are truly authentic and made with quail eggs.

There are lots of sushi "rolls." They come in either four or six pieces, and subject to your preference for size. No. 1 is Crunchy Roll, followed by Centipede Roll.

Entertaining

Chris Sayanthone enjoys entertaining kids and introducing them to sushi. He shapes the traditional centipede roll to look like a dragon and has the Spider Roll "grow" legs. Best of all is his rendition (if he's not too busy) of a Giant Clam which "appears" to be moving.

Sayanthone is known for his good jokes for adults and usually has a new one each day. All you need to do is ask.

"Sushi is food from my fingers and heart," said Sayanthone.

"It's an art. I enjoy bringing ocean life to the table in a creative way."

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Food for thought: Tokyo Sushi owner Chris Satake holds a tray of sushi he made in his restaurant.

Sushi dos and don'ts

Although Tokyo Sushi is the first in Birmingham, this popular Japanese eating trend has become readily available in metro-Detroit, but it is still frequently misunderstood.



Making sushi: A bamboo mat keeps ingredients, such as rice and dried seaweed, together while hands fashion a shrimp roll.

The word sushi is not equated to raw fish. Sushi is rice in combination with seafood. It may be topped with raw fish, but is commonly stuffed with cooked seafood and vegetables or wrapped in roasted seaweed.

Sushi chef and co-proprietor of Tokyo Sushi & Grill Chris Sayanthone offers the following dos and don'ts:

Two condiments, wasabi and gari, add to the enjoyment of sushi. Wasabi is green and made from Japanese horseradish root. It has sharp flavors, so a little dab on a piece of sushi goes a long way. Gari is thinly sliced pickled ginger root. Its role in sushi enjoyment is a palate cleanser. When eating different types of sushi, nibble on a ginger slice before sampling the next type.

Drowning sushi in a dish of soy sauce overwhelms the delicate taste and causes the rice to crumble, thus making it difficult to eat with either traditional chopsticks or fingers.

Correctly made sushi with fish has wasabi placed between the fish and rice to protect it from soy sauce. To eat it correctly, turn it so the fish topping faces downward; dip it lightly into a shallow dish of soy sauce and pop the whole piece in your mouth.

If you find the piece too big to place in your mouth whole, ask the sushi chef to cut it in half before serving it to you.

Mix wasabi with soy sauce to your taste preference for sashimi, sliced raw fish. Lightly dip the sashimi in the mixture before eating.

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