

Restaurants we love

WASABI IN NYACK

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There are so many things to love about Wasabi, the hip Japanese restaurant in Nyack. The food is always terrific, the wines are easy-drinking, the staff is friendly and the atmosphere is fun.

It's the kind of place where 20- and 30-something couples double-date, friends meet for a girls night out, and hipster foodies head to the sushi bar — where the adventurous let chef-owner Doug Nguyen choose whichever of his newest creative dishes he wants them to sample at the moment.

Yes, the food — innovative combinations of fresh fish and seasonal ingredients — is a big deal. But from the moment it opened in 2003, Wasabi has also been about the buzz. That's partly due to the hip vibe — fancy cocktails at the bar up front, dim lights, lime green walls and a super-long, comfy banquette that makes for easy conversation, even with your neighbors. But it's also because of the menu, which encourages — no, almost insists on — sharing. You know how at some restaurants, you'll order a bunch of things to share, and your meal comes out haphazardly and poorly paced? Not here. The staff at Wasabi has turned sharing into an art form: order whatever you want from the menu and it will appear on your table as if the chef had composed a tasting menu just for you and your friends.

You might want to start with one of Nguyen's signature dishes: Yellowtail-jalapeno. It's his take on the dish made famous by Nobu Matsuhisa of Nobu in Manhattan: Thinly sliced yellowtail, garnished with soy sauce and olive oil, and garnished with a ring of jalapeno. It's fun to pick up the fish with your chopsticks and fold it over the pepper, then put it in your mouth like a little jalapeno sandwich. The crunch and spice of the pepper versus the smooth texture of the fish is a fight where everybody wins.

Other ideas to throw in the



Mark Vergari/The Journal News

Wasabi in Nyack is a Japanese restaurant known for its hip vibe and innovative combinations of fresh fish and seasonal ingredients.

mix for your homemade tasting menu? Sunomono, which is tuna and crab wrapped in cucumber and served in a bowl with a vinegary sauce and sesame seeds. Or wakame salad, a seaweed salad mixed with chunks of tuna, salmon and yellowtail.

To add few cooked dishes to the mix, consider rock shrimp tempura — a sophisticated take on popcorn shrimp, tossed with a spicy citrus-mayonnaise sauce, and the truffle gyoza, pork dumplings with a creamy mushroom butter (mmm).

Nguyen is especially known for finding fun things to do with fruit. You'll see it in a few of his signature sushi rolls, such as strawberry and tuna (it sounds crazy, but don't miss it) and salmon tartare and mango.

Of course, the food at



Liz Johnson/The Journal News

Black cod with miso at Wasabi.

Wasabi is so tasty, you may not want to share. In that case, you can order a traditional meal by choosing from the small plates and entrees. Black cod with miso, served

warm, flakes beautifully and is intoxicatingly delicious. Lobster risotto is sinfully rich. You can even get a steak, if you're so inclined.

And here's an insider tip

If you go

Wasabi: 110 Main St., Nyack. 845-358-7977, wasabichi.com.

Hours: Lunch: noon to 2:30 p.m. Monday-Friday; Dinner 5-10 p.m. Monday-Thursday, til 11 p.m. Friday and Saturday. 4 to 9 p.m. Sunday.

Dinner for two, tax, tip and alcohol not included: \$75.

Good to know: If you have a large group, request one of the round booths when you make your reservation. They make the conversation — and the sharing of food — easier.

this case, it's made with salmon; and tuna-strawberry tartare on shrimp chips, a delightful combination of spicy fish and crispy chips.

You never know quite what to expect when you put yourself in Nguyen's hands. He's a one-man melting pot. He grew up in Vietnam, was raised by an Italian-American family in Stony Point and worked his way up the ladder in Japanese restaurants — and all of those influences show up in his cooking. He loves a good sausage and meatball hero, but understands the delicate nature and beauty of Japanese cuisine. He also understands that Americans want to have fun when they go out to dinner, and he makes dining fun.

And that's why his restaurant — terrific, easy, friendly, fun — is so easy to love.

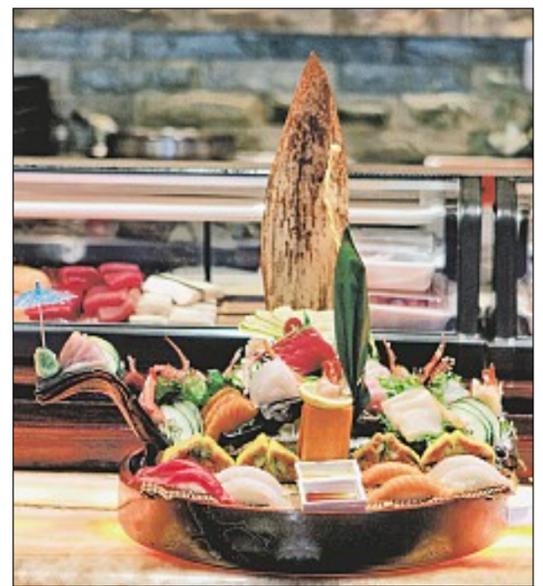
for two terrific dishes you should order that are not on the menu: Salmon Encrusted, which is like the Tuna Millennium, a flash-fried tuna encrusted in tempura, except in

Like Wasabi, but closer to home

Okinawa: So maybe it's not all sushi here, but you're sure to find fun: fancy cocktails in the trendy bar area, a family-friendly hibachi area, and an elevated dining area with dangling chandeliers and mood lighting. Don't worry, sushi is on the menu, too — try the Love Boat. 218 S. Highland Ave., Ossining. 914-762-9888. www.facebook.com/okinawaossining or 48 Triangle Center, Yorktown Heights. 914-962-8188.

Hanako Sushi: A simple, elegant bistro with a brightly lit sushi bar influenced by both the modern and ancient worlds. Patrons can order everything from a BMW salmon roll, which includes a number of different kinds of tuna and avocado, to a Fancy Dragon, which includes shrimp tempura, eel and spicy tuna. The frank staff and simple decor will steer you straight to a unique experience. *Japanese.* \$\$, 369 Downing Drive, Yorktown Heights. 914-245-9016.

Asagao Sushi: This is where to go when you want sushi without



Carucha L. Meuse/The Journal News

Try the Love Boat, a sushi platter for two, at Okinawa.

the scene. Plus, there's a twist: among the maki rolls and sashimi on the menu, you'll find such Korean dishes as bulgogi (bar-

becued beef) and bi-bim-bap, a spicy rice bowl. 8 Maple St., Croton-on-Hudson. 914-271-0770.

Here's a quick guide to reading a menu at a Japanese restaurant

Sure, you can go to a sushi restaurant and order from the menu. But the best sushi chefs are just like the best chefs in any other restaurant: they love to feed you.

So if you are game for an adventure, you should order what's called "omakase," (pronounced om-MA-kah-say). It means "up to you," or "I'm in your hands," and it means the chef will choose a menu for you and your guests.

It's best to sit at sushi counter, where you can sit in front of the chef and watch him as he works. You'll often get an education that way, too. The chef might tell you where the fish came from, or the story behind a dish. But even if he doesn't, there's something very special and really entertaining about watching your meal being prepared, and then eating it, with thanks, in front of the person who prepared it for you. Try it!

Glossary

Sometimes a sushi menu lists items by their Japanese names. Here's a look at translations of a few of the most popular ones.

Bonito: A variety of tuna.
Daikon: Radish.
Dashi: Broth made from bonito flakes.
Donburi: Rice bowl with a topping, often eel.
Ebi: Sweet shrimp, often raw.
Gari: Pickled ginger, used to cleanse the palette.
Gyoza: Dumplings, steamed then often but not always pan-fried.
Hamachi: Yellowtail.
Hirame: Halibut.
Hotatagai: Scallops.
Ikura: Salmon roe.
Maguro: Another variety of tuna.
Maki roll: A roll made of nori (dried seaweed), rice, and a filling, often fish, but sometimes vegetables.
Makisu: Bamboo sushi

rolling mat.

Nigri: The sushi that comes with one piece of fish (or another topping) over an oval-shaped piece of rice.

Otoro: Fatty tuna, thought to be the best part of the fish.

Ponzu: Tart citrus sauce.

Saba: Mackerel

Sake: Rice wine, served hot, warm, or cold.

Sake: Salmon. Pronounced "sha-kay" to avoid confusion with the wine.

Sashimi: Sliced raw fish.

Shiso: An herb — a leaf that's a cross between basil and mint, used as a garnish.

Tako: Octopus.

Tempura: A batter or foods fried in the batter.

Toro: A lower grade of fatty tuna.

Umeboshi: Pickled plum.

Unagi: Freshwater eel, usually served with a barbecue sauce.

Uni: Sea urchin "roe."

Wasabi: Japanese horseradish.



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