



New York abounds in fine Japanese restaurants. Some say that these restaurants are the equal of those in Tokyo. Japanese cuisine for a nation obsessed with weight, or overweight, serves as a dieter's delight. Designer Nicole Miller says, "every time I eat Japanese food (in this case at Nobu), I lose two pounds." Costly sometimes but who cares when it's all so good? Supermarkets sport cases of freshly sliced, diced and rolled packages of sushi with toro, mackerel, eel, or American-style California Roll. Gangs of children – big ones, little ones and those in-between – surround cases of pre-packaged Japanese food, choosing this one or that for school lunch or today's dinner. Mothers smile benignly knowing that little Jane or Jeremy is getting his or her daily protein requirement, missing out on all those fattening carbs, not eating any of that teeth-decaying sugar and above all not putting on weight.

So off I set with my little dish de vie to what is considered by the cognoscenti to be the finest Japanese restaurant in New York, and maybe Japan, **Sushi Yasuda**. Naomichi Yasuda, a part owner of the restaurant, is a master sushi chef of the old school. He lives, breathes and dreams sushi and has a natural feel for the raw, pure and honest which lends his work a refined, elegant sophistication. Raised in a small fishing village, Chikura in the prefecture of Chiba, Mr. Yasuda has 25 years of professional experience as a chef in Tokyo and New York. He trained and worked at the noted Japanese sushi restaurant Komazushi, as an eel chef at Haibara in Tokyo, and was the featured chef at famed Hatsuhana, New York, for 15 years.

His restaurant reflects the owner's quest for clean simplicity. The floors, walls and ceiling are lined in blond wood, the glass-front shoji-screen door is framed in brushed steel, the banquettes upholstered in a tranquil green-grey fabric. The bar where sushi master Yasuda can be seen at work is an L-shaped counter made of blond bamboo planks, selected and built by Yasuda himself. Yasuda guides and shapes the dinner experience, suggesting and selecting the choices. The fish is extraordinary. Yasuda's relationship with his fish distributor of many years ensures the finest fish, both local

and imported. Each piece, freshly cut and placed atop rice that is feather-light and delicate with a sweetness and perfect stickiness is transcendental.

Served on a large ti leaf, placed on the counter in front of you, with the palest fresh ginger and hand-made wasabi, each piece is individually/custom cut. Three yellow tail are available, buttery and velvet-textured – hamachi (young yellow tail), kanpachi (very young yellow tail) and shima aji (yellow jack); three kinds of prized fatty tunas – akami (red meat), chutoro (medium fatty), otoro (super fatty), come in six ascending levels of fatness, priced accordingly. There are four kinds of eel, five kinds of mackerel. The Spanish mackerel, lightly grilled and delicately seasoned, melted on the tongue, as did the black snapper white fish.

My young daughter and dining companion, an expert in tamago (sweet egg omelet) and watarigani kara-age (deep fried soft-shell-crab) rated both "heavenly and mouthwateringly good." Skittish on raw fish, but encouraged to try it she ended up consuming great quantities and graded Sushi Yasuda as "simply the best sushi I've ever eaten, the best anywhere." Yasuda – charming, patient, self-effacing, encouraged her – an incomparable sushi experience.

Not to be missed are **Nobu**, Drew Nieparent's temple to sushi, and its Soho neighbor, **Bond Street**, the hip, cool, young parlour for the swinging set. Nobu, under the direction of founder and Concorde-hopper Nobuyuki Matsuhisa, who revolutionized Japanese cuisine for a Western audience and led the way for haute east-west fusion cooking, remains thronged with celebrities and celebrity-watchers and is still amongst the hardest reservation to score in New York. Newer and more minimalistically austere, Bond Street offers a sensory experience as sophisticated and hip as the models seen eating there. Try a saketini – a sake martini. Good, but nothing like a gin with two pearly onions.

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