



Suite 225 – Japanese Fusion

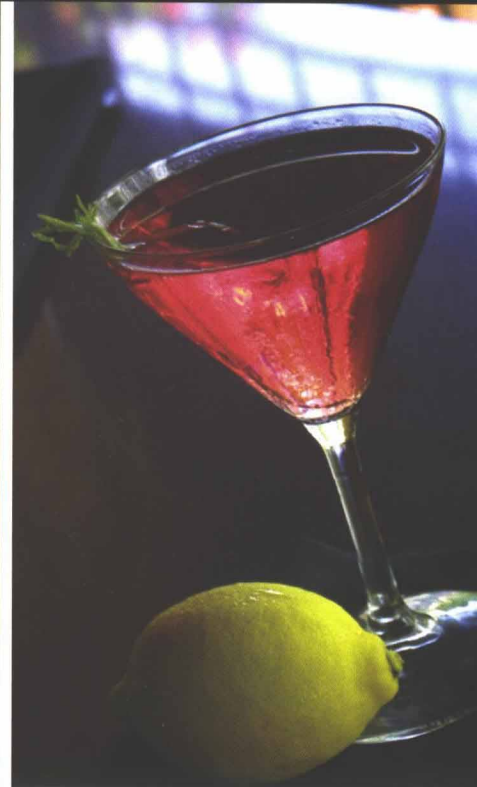
Sensational tastes emerge from contrasting cuisines

You'd better watch that guy. You never know what he's going to try next. Just when you think you've got him figured out, he'll do what you least expect. And you'll probably squeal with delight when he does.

Demetrio Zavala is the Executive Chef at Suite 225, a decidedly upscale Japanese restaurant that has opened its doors in Palm Beach County. Formerly of Max's Grille in Boca's Mizner Park, Demetrio is causing quite a stir on Ocean Avenue in Lantana.

Only a few months old, Suite 225 serves up "seafood, sushi, and style" to diners who are flocking to this once sleepy locale. Some come for the sparkling fresh sushi. Some come for divinely plush sashimi. And some come for a roster of East-meets-West dishes that ranks Suite 225 among the best fusion hot spots in the country. Regardless of what draws them, everyone leaves with a dreamily contented look in their eyes and a vow to return with friends in tow.

Successfully fusing different culinary philosophies is a tough trick. For a twenty-something chef, Demetrio has an understanding of fusion that surpasses his tender years. Drawing on his family heritage, he combines the flavors of his Cuban, Greek, and Mexican ancestry with the freshest local ingredients and transforms this Asian kitchen into a menu full of subtle transitions and surprises. Along the way, he shatters



the stereotype of Japanese food. Breaking the rules with confidence, he reminds me of Thomas Edison's quote, "There are no rules here—we're trying to accomplish something!" And indeed he does. Something sensational.

Even the décor at Suite 225 exhibits elements of fusion. In a marriage of tradition and technology, dark slate floors are inlaid with tiny iridescent mosaic tiles. Mahogany tables and chairs provide warmth in the dining room while large wall-hung plasma screens silently display a trendy movie release. Mini plasma monitors carry the same show in the restrooms, satisfying the thoroughly modern need for continuous entertainment.

Owner Irwin Peters and his sons Doug and Eric bring their New York sense of style to Suite 225. The Peters are no strangers to Japanese cuisine. Kyoto, their restaurant in Delray Beach, was voted Best Sushi Restaurant by Palm Beach Post and Sun-Sentinel readers and is still as hot as wasabi three years after opening. Operations Manager Dak Kerprich watches over the restaurants' loyal following, accommodating chauffeurs dispatched to fetch sushi for the rich and famous.

If sushi's not your thing, Suite 225 offers a stunning variety of cooked options from the open kitchen. The evening of my visit, I placed myself entirely in the hands of Jerry Reynolds, our capable server, and requested a menu sampling of the Chef's choosing.

To start, we tasted the Hoisin Bar-B-Q Ribs, heavenly baby backs scattered with scallions, along with Crispy Rock Shrimp, done tempura-style with a spicy citrus sauce, and my favorite—Salt & Peppa' Calamari, tentacle-free tendrils treated to a simple seasoning, tempura fried, and served with garlic crisps.

Available in large or small portions, the dishes on the 225 Tastings section of the menu include Crab Cakes with Veggie Mix & Crab Ginger Nage. Resting atop a mélange of spinach, mushroom, tomato, and corn, these sweet crab cakes were complemented by an emulsion of crab, ginger, and lime, and inscribed with a lemon aioli "225".

River Stone Seared Kobe Beef with Bar-B-Q Kiwi Soy ar-

rived at our table with its own burner, allowing us to cook it to our preferred temperature before dipping it in a decidedly fusion-style soy sauce flavored with kiwi, pablanos, balsamic, and ginger. The meltingly tender beef was enhanced by this unusual combination of ingredients and left me asking not why, but why not.

Vegetable lovers will discover wonderful choices among the innovative salad selections. The 225 Chopped Salad features cabbage, carrots, daikon, and scallion with crunchy wasabi peas and miso soy vinaigrette. Spinach and Asian Pear Salad proved to be a cross-cultural standout where sautéed pears infused with grapeseed oil share the spotlight with an elegant creamy French feta, red onion, and toasted almonds.

Next up are the noodles. My favorite was the Shrimp Scampi, homemade sriracha fettuccine (made with a paste of sun-ripened chilies and garlic), flambéed with shrimp, avocado, spinach, and grape tomatoes, finished with Bacardi rum and lime. Wok-Tossed Lo Mein, available with chicken, beef, or shrimp, is sautéed with ginger, garlic, and a black bean chili sauce and is another East-West winner.

Sesame Seared Tuna features sashimi scented with cumin, coated with black and white sesame seeds, plated on a bed of wasabi sticky rice, and served with a mango ponzu. Culinary daredevilry? Yes. But unabashedly successful.

Grilled Salmon is touched with a mango lemongrass emulsion and accompanied by a strawberry arugula salad. Absolutely inspired. Whole Snapper dusted with togarashi (a blend of seven Japanese spices) is deep fried and served with a fire-roasted orange-jalapeño nouc cham sauce. It made me swoon.

Desserts feature offbeat twists on traditional American comfort food. Mascarpone cheese made a guest appearance in the Strawberry Shortcake. Granny Smith apples took center stage in the Apple Turnover, which was wrapped in a spring roll sheet, flash fried and served with caramel sauce.

All of which left me wondering what this guy might do next.

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