

SUSHI ON THE SQUARE

A modern take on traditional Japanese cuisine that's simply superb

BY NICOLE MALICK | PHOTOS COURTESY OF ZAMA

Finding sushi in Philadelphia isn't always easy, especially if you're looking for high-quality, adventurous dishes. For Zama Restaurant, just off Rittenhouse Square, impressive sushi is just one piece of the equation. Zama's an inviting, intimate dining space: a sushi bar, a handful of booths and several tables span the restaurant, with crisp wooden planks (a twist on wood paneling) covering every wall. Throughout our meal, the servers proved knowledgeable and unintrusive but, at times, a little too quick to clear the final morsels of a dish—because every last bite, artfully prepared by Chef Hiroyuki “Zama” Tanaka, is worth it.

From the first bite, the food tastes familiar but is reinvented with new sauces, spices and ingredients. The edamame sampler (\$10) came with three distinct salts: wasabi, yuzu (a

Japanese citrus) and smoked soy. Soft-shell shrimp (\$9), served in-shell and with just-spicy-enough shisito peppers, was a thrill to eat—everything from head to tail was edible, crisp and sweet. The *nasu dengaku* (\$10), a hollowed eggplant half-stuffed with sauteed ground chicken, and the fried brussels sprouts (\$5), a side dish with truffled cashews and Parmesan cheese, showed Chef Zama's creativity even with simple vegetables.

One of the best dishes was the black cod *saikyo-yaki* (\$24), understandably known as “but-terfish.” Zama's version gives the melt-in-your-mouth consistency black cod is famous for, without excessive sweetness. The tuna *tataki* (\$18) was similarly excellent; the seared tuna sashimi with a powerful miso honey sauce was tricky to eat with chopsticks, which only made each vegetable-topped

bite more rewarding.

While impressive turquoise bowls of sushi (\$16-\$36) were delivered to several diners in the restaurant, I only sampled two of the more intricate rolls. The best of the two (and my favorite dish overall) was the wasabi lobster (\$18), a shrimp California roll sprinkled with wasabi topped with a lobster salad. Each piece was presented with a plump drop of mango chili sauce that blended the rich flavors together perfectly. An overpowering citrus flavor of the Bronzizzle (\$16), a cucumber and avocado roll topped with branzino fish, was the only drawback to the otherwise delicious second roll. The meal came to a close with spicy shrimp tempura hand rolls (\$13), in lieu of the traditional tamago, ending a very memorable feast.

Chef Zama's menu will introduce you to new things and make you fall in love all over

again with dishes you thought couldn't get better. It may be too expensive for the college-aged diner, but when you're craving sushi and have the cash, an a la carte sushi menu (\$3-\$17 per roll), a maki lunch set (\$15) and a dinner tasting menu (\$36) await.

ZAMA RESTAURANT
Rittenhouse Square
128 S. 19th St.
(215) 568-1027

DON'T MISS: Wasabi lobster roll.
SKIP: Philadelphia or other typical (Americanized) rolls.

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