

Mikuni

What a wonderful group I had the pleasure of spending my Thursday evening with! My friends from Davis Life Magazine, and our special guests, started our Mikuni review evening at Sophia's for drinks. This is one of the best places in all of Davis to begin a pleasant night out. The lounge area is quiet (before it gets really busy in the evenings), and quaintly tropical. It possesses a soft ambiance reminiscent of a tropical hideaway that's perfect for a small group. Comfortable cushioned rattan furniture, a beautiful fish tank for soft light, and a very sweet waitress set the stage.

My husband Pete Nowlen, our editor Cary Arnold and her husband Jon Sanchez, along with our photographer Ara Arbabzadeh, met our guest reviewers for the evening, Bill and Katherine Alger at Sophia's. Bill is Chief Operating Officer for Woodland Healthcare, and Katherine works for Sutter Health as the Pharmacy Informatics Specialist for Sacramento Sierra Region. We all got to know each other over cocktails. Several of us had Sophia's Mojitos, while others ordered a cabernet, a Tequini, and a Grey Goose Cosmo thrown in for variety. We chatted about the events of the day for a few minutes, and since we were very much looking forward to our coming sushi dinner, we decided pretty quickly to walk to Mikuni.

For those of you who don't know, Mikuni recently took over the spot at Campus Commons that Fuzio's vacated. Luckily (since I happen to like the place), Fuzio's has simply moved to another location downtown.

The first thing I noticed was the noise level. It was somewhat busy, and loud, which is great for a newly opened restaurant. Considering their reputation in Sacramento it's not surprising. Not so great for my poor hearing (hairstylist for 22 years, think many blow-dries), and there are TV screens everywhere, which I hate. I'm like a magpie, distracted by shiny things. But the cheery greeting you get is welcoming enough to make up for that. We were given a high, comfortable table near the front of the restaurant, and we put in our orders after a few minutes of discussion. Cary had some suggestions for the table, Pete and I had some very definite ideas about what we should try, as did Bill and Katherine.

First things first: we needed to try some of their signature drinks and order some of the small plates. I had the Mikuni Cosmo, with Absolut vodka, plum wine, and cranberry juice. For me it was a little sweet, but very easy to drink. Pete had the Pamatini: Grey Goose Vodka, pomegranate liqueur, Triple Sec, cranberry juice and a splash of Sprite; "about the same", Pete said. Cary had the Japatini, excellent, and made with Stoli Cranberry Vodka, Triple Sec, orange juice, lime juice, and Sprite (I ordered two of these a few days later in Sacramento I enjoyed it so much), and Jon had the Key Lime Moto, which is made with Absolut Vanilla Vodka, Malibu Coconut Rum, Midori Melon Liqueur, pineapple juice, Sweet & Sour, and lime juice. It was really, really sweet, so be warned! Ara had the Wasabi Bloody Mary, made with Grey Goose Citron Vodka, Secret Bloody Mary Mix, lime juice, and wasabi stuffed olives. Bill had a glass of Ravenswood red, and his lovely wife Katherine was talked into trying the Sake sampler by Pete and

ME.

The sampler was a great idea for the table, even though Katherine didn't care for two of the sakes (she thought they were too sweet). Since I (and Cary) don't particularly care for sake, I got to try them in a different way. The sake sampler has four different types. They included apple, blueberry, and two "normal" premium sakes. Cary and I liked the two fruit infused varieties, and Pete liked the other two. They were perfectly served in a small collection of shot glasses. The apple infused sake tasted like a jolly rancher to me (just a little to apple-y), but I liked the blueberry quite a bit; Cary liked the apple. Katherine decided to order hot sake instead (which she originally wanted) and which she liked well enough to order again later in the evening, though she says she wishes she had tried the Sake Bomb!

Our Freaky Edamame arrived with the drinks, which for some reason seemed to take forever. The edamame is really something! Served warm, which I think is a vast improvement over the usual cold edamame, and perfectly seasoned. I really liked it. It has just a tiny bite to it, lightly salted and spicy. I could eat it all night with some drinks, but luckily our orders started arriving quickly enough. At \$5.00, The Freaky Edamame is only a dollar more than the regular edamame, and well worth it.

Our next small plate was the high point of the evening. The Black and White: perfect Albacore Tuna Toro, lightly seared and served with caviar and ponzu dressing. O. M. G. It's one of the three best dishes I've ever tasted. The tuna melted in my mouth. This dish is perfectly tender, very lightly seared, with a wonderful light salty seasoning. I could do without the jalapeños, but Ara loved them. It's not cheap at \$13.00, but I know I'll have it any time I'm back. (I actually did two days later.)

Our next dish was one of their party platters. We ordered Platter F. It included 3 sushi rolls, two types of Ngiri Sushi, or tuna on rice, and a selection of the freshest sashimi I've ever had. The rolls included the Fair Oaks Roll: panko shrimp, avocado, masago, sauce and onion, (very good), the Spider Roll: deep fried soft shell crab, avocado, cucumber, kaiware, sauce, masago, and onion (the crab unfortunately a little overcooked), and the Bob's Roll: panko shrimp, cream cheese, crab mix, avocado, salmon, masago, onion and a special sauce. One little complaint, everyone at the table agreed, cream cheese does **not** belong in sushi (other friends of mine said the same thing two nights later just before I did!). The dish was, overall, worth the money at \$65.00. A better way to go may be to order the Chirashi (a large portion of sashimi over rice), and your choice of rolls, but if you aren't sure what kind of rolls to order, the platters are great. Mikuni has the best Sashimi I've ever had. Bill thought it was "to die for", Katherine said "fabuloso", and I can't disagree with either of them.

Over the next half hour or so we ordered various sushi rolls. This included the Train Wreck Roll: panko shrimp, spicy avocado blend, and crab mix topped with chopped eel, seared tuna, roasted sesame seeds, onion, and special sauce, the Peter 2 Roll: panko shrimp, crab salad, spicy tuna, avocado, eel, seared tuna, 2 spicy dream sauces, masago

and onion, and the Pimp My Roll: spicy tuna, panko shrimp, avocado, fresh salmon, and special sauces lightly torched and topped with masago, onion, and macadamia nuts.

We had quite the discussion about the merits of the sushi rolls. Everyone agreed that all of the rolls were very good, and everyone had a favorite. Mikuni is known for elevating the sushi roll to another level, and I think they deserve the reputation. But in the end we all agreed that after a while they start tasting a bit the same. They're all very complex, with wonderful sauces, and textures, but we all enjoyed the simple sashimi better, nobody does sashimi better than Mikuni. Bill had a wonderful quote, "The rolls were like double cheesburgers loaded with everything, whereas the sashimi was like filet mignon.." All of the rolls we tried were around \$14.00 apiece.

We followed the sushi rolls with the BBQ Albacore, the Albacore Pepperfin, and what was supposed to be Unagidon (grilled eel over rice), which Pete insisted had to be tried, but accidentally arrived as Don Don (hamachi toro with onions and wasabi sprouts over rice). We were very confused when we first tried it, so our opinions were a little off. We were surprised at how different the texture and presentation was from the usual unagidon, but after realizing the mistake we decided we didn't really care for the Don Don anyway. The texture and taste were not that pleasant. The fish is fresh enough, but the texture overwhelms it for me. Pete said the Unagidon was fine, not spectacular, but fine. The Don Don was \$15.00, and the Unagidon \$17.00

The BBQ Albacore was my second favorite dish of the night. The pieces of tuna are lightly seasoned with Mikuni BBQ sauce, seared perfectly, and just the right size so as not to overwhelm like seared tuna can in some entrées. Make sure to order both red and white sauce with this dish. Cary made us try the tuna with both sauces at once, and she was right, together the sauces have the perfect balance of savory and spicy. The Davis location only has the smaller size, at \$7.00, so we ordered two.

I can't say I was as excited about the Albacore Pepperfin. I have to confess right off that I can't abide sesame oil, and I don't care for jalapeños (forgive me), so my opinion on this dish is compromised. But everyone else thought it was very good. Bill said it was one of his favorites (along with the Sashimi, the Pimp My Roll, and the Black and White) The Pepperfin consists of thin slices of albacore tuna in citrus seasoned soy dressing, topped with jalapeños. \$11.25

We asked our server if he thought there was anything else we should try before dessert. He recommended the Flaming Shrooms. Me, not so much. Flaming Shrooms are lightly fried overstuffed mushrooms with crab, cream cheese, and jalapeños, lightly drizzled with special sauce and finished with shaved bonito flakes and onions. OK, we're back to the cream cheese thing again (I didn't read a description, so sue me), and jalapeños (again). But overall they were just not good, and very hard to eat. My recommendation is just don't go there.

Cary wanted to have the Mochi ice cream dessert, but they didn't have it. We were told they did have it earlier in the week, but it was much more popular than expected so they

sold out. Good for them, not for us. So we settled for the cheesecake dessert. It was described like cheesecake spring rolls. But we thought of them more like a cannoli. A very mild cheesecake slice was wrapped in a pastry and lightly fried. It was rather nice. The sauces were pleasant, and the pastry not overdone. Not bad for a simple dessert. Katherine was disappointed that there was no green tea ice cream, but that may have been temporary also.

Overall Pete and I liked this place well enough to go to the Sacramento location the following Sunday. Other than our small companion Sarah, who had a wonderful children's udon, we had a very similar meal. We had to show off to our friends Lena and Richard, and so we haven't tried any of the more traditional Japanese dishes. We'd normally have Miso soup, and possibly something a little different, such as their Musolini pasta: udon noodles sautéed with tiger prawns, Alaskan snow crab, asparagus and mushrooms, tossed in olive oil and garlic. Another O. M. G.? Maybe, but one thing I know about Mikuni, the menu is big enough, and pleasing enough, to warrant many return trips.

A nice tip from our diners, if you are on the fence about trying sushi, get a group of friends together for a sushi night. It's easier to get started when you are with people who enjoy sushi. I promise you there's something for everyone, not all sushi contains raw fish. Tempura (battered and lightly deep fried shrimp or crab) is a very common ingredient in sushi rolls. But the selection of sushi and sashimi is so varied that you might want some help. Have someone along who knows what to order, or ask the servers, and I can practically guarantee you a pleasant surprise.