



A new sushi superstar for Kyoto

When Chef Rei Masuda opened Sushi Wakon, the restaurant at the new Four Seasons Kyoto, he met an unexpected problem: the water. Unlike that of Tokyo, where Rei had cooked for the previous two years, Kyoto's water is soft, and its low minerality upset the rice-cooking technique Rei had perfected as an acolyte of the world's most famous sushi chef, Jiro Ono. His solution? Cook the rice in mineral water instead.

Sushi Wakon's 10 comfortable armchair-style seats (a couple more can be squeezed in for bigger parties) are arranged along a counter made from a single eight-foot piece of cypress wood, from Nara Prefecture. It is

two centuries old and, it transpires, not for leaning on while you make notes on dinner.

Four appetisers are served on noteworthy beautiful ceramics sourced from the Kyoto Ceramic Art Association: antique glass for horsehair crab with caviar, a nacred dish for straw-smoked yellowtail. Then comes the sushi. The available pieces change daily, of course, but each meal will involve the familiar (scallop, fatty tuna), the unfamiliar (gizzard shad, who may have once played bass for Slade), the luxurious – two types

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of sea urchin, with small variations of colour and texture – and the downright odd. Here it is what the menu calls fugu roe. Technically it's the milt of the male pufferfish (yes, the potentially lethal one): an ivory coil whose chopstick-resistant skin, though the dish is scorchingly hot, recalls a rice pudding gone cold. The resemblance extends to the matter inside the sac, a starchy-yet-seawatery fluid packed with soft granules. It is what you go to Japan to eat: something unrecognisable, not necessarily moreish, but that you're glad to have tried. And to never try again.

Behind and above the counter where the two chefs work, a wall-long mosaic of beaten tin spells out stars and pennants: neat, lean, impressive but understated, it nicely mirrors the food. **NDAS**

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