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Food & Drink | REVIEW

Big Fish

Bamboo proves you can have your principles and eat them, too.

BY BRIAN PANGANIBAN

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RAW DEAL: Sushi chef Jason Knowles snacks on Bamboo's Eskimo Box.

IMAGE: Jenna Biggs

One would think a cuisine as old and steeped in tradition as sushi would have a difficult time adjusting to the realities of the modern world. However, with many species of marine life overfished to the point of near extinction, adjustments need to be made. Luckily, Southeast Portland's Bamboo Sushi is a perfect example of the cuisine's adaptability. As the first Marine Stewardship Council-certified independent sushi restaurant in the United States, Bamboo is tackling the question of whether sushi can still wow and delight using seasonal and sustainable ingredients. The answer is a resounding yes.

When owner Kristofor Lofgren closed what was then Masu East last November to switch both name and menu, what resulted was a list of fish with many notable absences. There's no unagi, bluefin toro or octopus here, since Bamboo only serves items that can be either safely harvested from species with healthy populations, or farmed in a manner that doesn't harm the surrounding environment, something that can't be said about those popular items. It doesn't seem like much of a sacrifice. The MSC-certified albacore tuna nigiri (\$4.50), for instance, is as buttery-funky as any piece of tuna belly could wish to be. Pieces of glistening wild ivory salmon (\$5) are lightly smoked in-house and, when coupled with Bamboo's texturally perfect sushi rice, make for a dangerously addictive mouthful. The sea-eel roll (\$5) may lack the sticky-sweetness of *kabayaki* (sauce-laden *unagi*, or

freshwater eel), but the briny subtlety of the *anago*, or saltwater eel, paired with cucumbers is a refreshing change.

Bamboo's veggie rolls go beyond a random slapping of julienned veggies in a roll of rice. The 310 roll (\$11) marries sweet shiitakes with fried, marinated tofu and, of all things, roasted red pepper. Depending on how the 310 is assembled, certain bites are dominated by the red-pepper flavor, though pieces of the roll where the components are better balanced are sublime. There is a bit of a price premium per order compared with places that have conventional sourcing policies, but it's a small price to pay to dine guilt-free on fish of this quality.

The *yaki* plates portion of the menu attracts those wishing to forgo the raw stuff, and the back of the house is no less interested in making these dishes sing as their sushi bar counterparts. Mixed seafood and vegetable tempura (\$8) is hot, airy and nearly greaseless, the tempura batter enhancing rather than obscuring the ingredients. The MSC-certified black cod (\$10) is glazed with roasted garlic and cooked with smoked soy. It's ridiculously good, hitting every single umami sensor in the mouth, the fish tender without being mushy. The *agedashi* tofu (\$6), batter-dipped, deep fried and swimming in bonito broth and shaved bonito, is just shy of perfect, the misstep being, of all things, the unusual use of firm tofu rather than the more traditional and flavor-

neutral silken variety. Rather than act as a vehicle for all the myriad flavors, the tofu dominates the dish.

With an extensive sake and wine list; a sleek, clean design that remains unchanged from its Masu East days; and a knowledgeable and enthusiastic staff, Bamboo is proof positive that success does not have to come at the cost of your ideals. Who knew responsibility could be so tasty?

- **Order this:** The black cod. Dear lord, the black cod.
- **Best deal:** The organic mixed greens with champagne miso-mustard vinaigrette, poached egg and goat cheese (\$10) could stand alone as an entrée.
- **I'll pass:** Switch out the tofu in the *agedashi* for softer stuff and we'll talk.

EAT: Bamboo Sushi, 310 SE 28th Ave., 232-5255, bamboosushipdx.com. Dinner 5-10 pm daily. \$\$ Moderate.

Originally Published on

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