



The Rosengarten Report

THE FOODS AND WINES THAT MAKE ME SWOON

THIS MONTH'S TASTING SCOOP

MAKE IT JAPANESE AND MAKE IT QUICK!!!

Now Is the Time for the Awesome Convenience of Real Japanese Food

Look around. Wave your antennae downwind of the world's trendiest kitchens. Take a good, deep inhalation of the gastronomic air. What are your senses telling you?

If they're anything like my senses, they're saying that . . . Japanese food is the "it" cuisine of 2005. Aside from the sudden ubiquity of *sushi* bars (both in downscale "neighborhood" versions, and in bank-busting high-end versions), many of the hottest fancy-chef restaurants in Paris, London, New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco right now are Japanese, or Japanese-inspired. Americans have finally discovered that when it comes to food obsession, the Japanese rank right up there with the French—an obsession that leads to restaurant experiences of rarefied focus, distinctiveness and purity.

But, alas, not everyone will be able to take advantage of this delirious Japanese surge. The exalted places, by and large, are in major cities only—and, if you can afford to live in one of them, that may not leave a lot over to spend \$500 for two people downtown at Megu in New York, or \$1000 for two people uptown at Masa. A lot of the fuel behind the big-deal Japanese restaurant is supplied by the super-exclusive ingredients

(astounding *sashimi*-grade fish, the finest beef in the world, *matsutake* mushrooms that make porcini seem cheap, etc.) that the chef is working with—and you can be certain that the chef

is looking at insane food costs. The concept of insanity, of course, is gladly passed on to you; it's called a "check."

However, there is a huge silver lining to this cloud of \$25-a-plate *edamame*, the low-priced ante-up at Megu. For as in any great food tradition, the Japanese simultaneously revere the expensive and exotic on the one hand . . . and the everyday, the convenient on the other hand! As in any great food tradition, the very presence of a super-high-end has a trickle-down effect, dribbling its standards, and its excitement, into foods and dishes that real people can afford to buy and eat all the time. Japanese cuisine is especially strong in this delicious simultaneity—and especially convenient! For the food industry in Japan, with the same ingenuity that other kinds of man-

ufacturers in Japan have turned out startlingly good, startlingly low-cost products for the world to consume, has, over the last few decades, created a cornucopia of Japanese convenience foods that always put you within a few minutes of exquisite and authentic Japanese dining.

GODZILLA JAPANESE ISSUE!

ALMOST 100 PRODUCTS
RECOMMENDED:

- Rice • Sashimi-Grade Fish • Soy Sauce • Fresh Wasabi
- Nori • Noodles • Ponzu Sauce • Kobe-Style Beef
- Cooking Wine • Green Tea . . . and many, many more

PLUS:

FIFTEEN GREAT RECIPES
AND RECIPE IDEAS

- Udon Noodles with Scallops and Monkfish
- Red Miso Soup with Meatballs and Deep-Fried Tofu
- Rice Casserole with Shiitakes, Shiso and Pickled Plums
- Communal Shabu-Shabu Dinner
- The "Real" Chicken Teriyaki . . . and many more

EQUIPMENT, RESTAURANTS,
TECHNIQUES, TRENDS,
PHILOSOPHY, ATTITUDE

PLUS . . . The Beverage that's Rocking Tokyo
(Hint: It's NOT Sake!!!)

SLICING SASHIMI

The most common type of cut for *sashimi* is called the *hira-zukuri* cut—which is much simpler than it sounds, as it is basically the cutting of fish into rectangular slices. To accomplish it, you must first cut a filet of fish into a rectangular block (you may also ask your fishmonger to do this). The classic Japanese notion is that this rectangular block is the heart of a filet, that you've whittled away the lesser fish, leaving the best part of the filet to be sliced into *sashimi*. When I prepare my rectangular block, I like it to yield slices that are about 2½" long, and 1¼" wide—so two sides of my block will have those dimensions (the other dimension will be much longer, perhaps 8", depending on the size of your fish filet). Then comes the all-important cut, cutting the block into slices. The classic thickness of each *sashimi* slice is ⅜"—though some chefs like to cut soft fish (like salmon) a little thicker, and firm fish (like red snapper) a little thinner. I myself almost always make slices from all types of fish that are thinner than ⅜"; I usually prefer the chew of a thinner slice.

And how exactly do you slice? For starters, you must work

KEY INGREDIENT:

Wasabi

here is a ton of confusion about *wasabi*, and its proper use with *sashimi* and *sushi*. You

can nightly observe the most damaging confusion, by walking into any American *sushi* bar and watching some of the customers terminally overload their fish with the stuff; the *sushi* chefs wince to themselves, but are usually too polite to point out that over-use of *wasabi* kills the flavor of the fish. *Wasabi* should be a delicate accent, dabbed on highly judiciously, not a palate-searing macho game.

But there is an even more basic *wasabi* confusion—because most of the *wasabi* consumed in the U.S. is not even *wasabi*! Real *wasabi* is a root known scientifically as *wasabia japonica*, quite expensive, which some *sushi* chefs grate fresh to accompany *sushi*. For a very long time it was not available in the U.S. So at *sushi* bars here—and even at many *sushi* bars in Japan—a much easier, much less expensive substitute is used for the real thing: a paste made from horseradish, perhaps with mustard powder added, colored green to look like the real *wasabi*. This paste comes in tubes, or in powdered form (like Colman's mustard), to be mixed with a little water. This ersatz stuff—which, I must confess, I came to like before I knew the dis-

tinction—is much hotter, much harsher than real, fresh-grated *wasabi*, and quite different in taste.

But now there's happy news! The real stuff is finally available to American consumers! For some time now, fresh *wasabi* root (the real thing) has been growing in the fields of a few West Coast producers, and in Canada, and has been available across the U.S. in a very limited way. I tasted a few of these recently, and liked them very much. However, the really big news is that the U.S. government has recently okayed the importation of fresh *wasabi* roots grown in Japan—and that this product, in my tasting, blew everything else (fresh, real, ersatz, tubed or powdered) off the table!

If you like *wasabi*, and especially if you're making *sushi* at home, please try to acquire the amazing

Tokyo Kaneku

Fresh Wasabi Root (Market Price, averaging \$30 for a 100-gram root / TOK), grown in duly flooded fields by a Japanese company founded in 1905. The *wasabi* root I was lucky enough to acquire was about 7" long, and just about 1" in diameter; it was a mossy green on the outside, with nubby dark-brown eyes. I observed three layers when I cut into it—the outer skin, a ring just under the skin (the most flavorful part), and a fat, pale-green heart. It's all good, all useable; grate everything, including the skin. To get started, you cut off

with a really sharp knife—preferably the *sashimi-bocho* knife that Japanese sushi chefs use, the long one that is beveled on one side, usually the left side. An excellent one, the Kershaw Shun Pro Yanagiba Slicing Knife, 10⅝", is available for \$143.20 from Chef's Resource (log on to www.chefsresource.com). See more details about Kershaw's Japanese knives in the September 29, 2003 *Rosengarten Report*.

The most important thing to keep in mind about *sashimi* slicing is that you don't want to shred the fish; you want your slice to be completely smooth, clean, intact around the edges. Japanese chefs accomplish this by slicing through the fish in a single motion. The classic way to do this is to place the lower portion of the blade (the part near the bolster) on top of the fish chunk to be cut; Japanese chefs normally start cutting on the right-hand side of the chunk, and they place the knife so that it slants down slightly to the left. Draw the knife towards you, so that by the time the tip of the knife has reached you you have, in a single motion, separated one slice of *sashimi* from the fish chunk. Set slice aside, and continue cutting more slices. If *sashimi* is your main course, figure about a third of a pound of fish per diner. Serve with soy sauce, *wasabi* and *gari*.

the stem, and start grating the surface that's cut; the best *wasabi* of all will come from this spot. Japanese chefs prefer to grate fresh *wasabi* on a shark skin grater, which is a piece of skin from an angel shark glued onto a piece of wood. Happily, Tokyo Kaneku will be glad to ship you one for about \$25—but another type of fine grater will do. You rub the cut part of the root over the grater in a circular motion until you have gathered enough grated pulp for your *sushi*. Wrap the remainder of the root tightly, refrigerate, and use as soon as possible for maximum flavor.

And what flavor! It's a whole different world. When you taste this stuff side-by-side with the more common stuff, you realize how much the latter tastes like horseradish. This doesn't—showing much more of a vegetal, herbal, root-y kind of flavor, something like celery root or parsnip. A very attractive feature is its relative mildness, which enables you to enjoy it *and* avoid the dreaded *wasabi* burn. Lastly, the texture is remarkable—creamy and fluffy simultaneously.

Grating your own *wasabi*, however, is admittedly not the most convenient way to get a *wasabi* hit. If you want *wasabi* convenience . . . well, I tasted through more than a dozen options, and came up with these *wasabi* winners:

Pacific Coast Organic Field Wasabi Powder

(\$29 for a 1.6-oz. bag / PCW).

This is *wasabi* powder with a difference—for it is made from 100% fresh *wasabi* root, none of the fake stuff. It is produced by a Canadian grower of fresh *wasabi*, and it is as close to a real root taste as any powder can come. Light-green, thick and lumpy when mixed with a little water, medium-hot.

Pacific Farms 100% Wasabi Paste (\$39.45 for six 1.53-oz. tubes / PAF). I like this spring-green *wasabi* paste a good deal—but it's not what I'd expected. It's produced by a *wasabi* grower in Oregon, and the label claims that it's made from 100% real *wasabi*. However, what I like about it is that it tastes like a bright version of the classic, artificial, American *sushi*-bar *wasabi* taste, plus a little sweetness. The texture is more real than the taste: wet, almost fluffy, with a slightly fibrous chew.

Tokyo Kaneku Natural Colored Wasabi (\$8 for a 2.2-lb. bag / TOK). Now, if you're hell-bent on that familiar, horseradish-y, non-*wasabi wasabi* taste—why not buy some powder from the people who really know *wasabi*, the growers of my #1 *wasabi* root? They make this powdered product from horseradish, and color it with spinach—but I'm awfully fond of its sweet, full, quite hot profile. Sometimes you just want what you remember from years ago—sophistication be damned.

CRACK THE CODE . . . AND FIND YOUR JAPANESE FOOD FAST!

ow that you're ready to taste real, convenient Japanese food for yourself, here's all the info you'll need to get it. Every swoony product in this "Godzilla" issue is accompanied by a three-letter code, listed after the name and price. Simply match the code up with its counterpart on this page (it's listed here alphabetically), and all the ordering information will be at your fingertips. For example, if a product reads **Hamaotome Furikake Ebi Shirasu (\$3.95 for a 1.7-oz. bag / KAT)**, simply locate **KAT** on the following list—where you'll find all the contact details for Katagiri, and its treasure trove of *furikake*.

CAT / Catalina Offshore Products
5202 Lovelock St.
San Diego, CA 92110
619.297.9797 (tel)
619.297.9799 (fax)
www.catalinaop.com
Ordering Notes: Catalina accepts orders by phone or on their web site, but it's best to call them if you want to order a small amount, as there is a 2-lb. minimum for most web site orders.

CHE / ChefShop.com Inc.
305 9th Ave. North
Seattle, WA 98109
206.286.9988 (tel)
877.337.2491 (toll-free)
206.267.2205 (fax)
www.chefshop.com

EAR / Earthy Delights
1161 E. Clark Rd., Suite 260
DeWitt, MI 48820
517.668.2402 (tel)
800.367.4709 (toll-free)
517.668.1213 (fax)
www.earthy.com

GES / Great Eastern Sun
92 McIntosh Rd.
Asheville, NC 28806
828.665.7790 (tel)

800.334.5809 (toll-free)
828.667.8051 (fax)
www.great-eastern-sun.com
Ordering Notes: Orders are accepted on their web site only.

GMN / Gold Mine Natural Food Co.
7805 Arjons Dr.
San Diego, CA 92126
858.537.9830 (tel)
800.475.3663 (toll-free)
858.695.0811 (fax)
www.goldminenaturalfood.com

HON / Honolulu Fish Company
824 Gulick Ave.
Honolulu, HI 96819
808.833.1123 (tel)
888.475.6244 (toll-free)
808.836.1045 (fax)
www.honolulufish.com

KAT / Katagiri & Co., Inc.
224 East 59th St.
New York, NY 10022
212.755.3566 (tel)
212.752.4197 (fax)
www.katagiri.com
Ordering Notes: Katagiri is by far the biggest and best source we found for mail-order Japanese food. They also accept orders by fax and on their web site, but I suggest ordering by phone, as the product names on their web site don't always match up with the labels.

MAR / Maruwa.com, Inc.
10562 San Pablo Ave.
El Cerrito, CA 94530
510.528.5210 (tel)
510.528.3910 (fax)
www.maruwa.com
Ordering Notes: Orders are accepted on their web site only.

OCH / O-Cha.com
Umega Port "E"
8-7 Umega-Cho, Taira
Iwaki City, Fukushima
970-8026 Japan
www.o-cha.com
Ordering Notes: Orders are accepted on their web site only.

PAF / Pacific Farms
P. O. Box 51505

Eugene, OR 97405
541.997.7553 (tel)
800.927.2248 (toll-free)
541.997.7563 (fax)
www.freshwasabi.com

PCW / Pacific Coast Wasabi, Ltd.
1050 Alberni St., Suite 450
Vancouver, BC
V6E 1A3 Canada
604.682.4577 (tel)
604.688.4528 (fax)
www.wasabia.com

QUI / Quickspice Inc.
6051 East Telegraph Rd.
Commerce, CA 90040
323.728.4762 (tel)
866.977.7423 (toll-free)
323.888.0780 (fax)
www.quickspice.com
Ordering Notes: Orders are accepted on their web site only.

RAM / RamenDepot.com
27 Southlake Dr.
San Jose, CA 95138
408.225.7775 (tel)
www.ramendepot.com

SHZ / ShizuokaTea.com
20651 Golden Springs Rd.
Suite 271
Walnut, CA 91789
909.598.9255 (tel)
909.598.9255 (fax)
www.shizuokatea.com
Ordering Notes: It is best to place orders through their web site.

SLT / Salt Traders, Inc.
P. O. Box 11424
Aspen, CO 81612
970.544.5079 (tel)
800.641.7258 (toll-free)
970.544.5087 (fax)
www.salttraders.com

SRF / Snake River Farms
1555 Shoreline Dr., 3rd Floor
Boise, ID 83702
208.338.2500 (tel)
800.657.6305 (toll-free)
208.338.2605 (fax)
www.snakeriverfarms.com
Ordering Notes: It is best to place orders through their web site. There

will be a link on their homepage for *Rosengarten Report* readers, which will be available for a limited time only. You can also order a sampler package containing 1 lb. each of the Shabu-Shabu and Yakimiku cuts.

SRM / South River Miso
888 Shelburne Falls Rd.
Conway, MA 01341
413.369.4057 (tel)
413.369.4299 (fax)
www.southernrivermiso.com

STA / Stash Tea Company
7204 SW Durham Rd.
Suite 200
Tigard, OR 97224
503.624.1911 (tel)
800.826.4218 (toll-free)
503.684.4424 (fax)
www.stashtea.com

SUS / Sushi Foods Co.
3732 Oleander Dr.
San Diego, CA 92106
619.222.8076 (tel)
888.817.8744 (toll-free)
619.222.0865 (fax)
www.sushifoods.com

TAK / Takashimaya New York
693 5th Ave.
New York, NY 10022
212.350.0179 (tel)
800.753.2038 (toll-free)
212.350.0192 (fax)

TOK / Tokyo Kaneku International Corp.
1170 Mclester St., Unit 5
Elizabeth, NJ 07201
908.351.1433 (tel)
908.351.1667 (fax)
www.tokyokaneku.com

TWO / Two Leaves and a Bud, Inc.
c/o WorldPantry.com, Inc.
601 22nd St.
San Francisco, CA 94107
415.401.0080 (tel)
866.972.6879
(toll-free for orders)
866.528.0832
(toll-free for questions)
415.401.0087 (fax)
www.twoleavesandabud.com

MOVE OVER SAKE:

here's an irony in this that any good Zen Buddhist would appreciate. Just as sake sales had started to soar in the U.S., just as sake had become an American foodie obsession (myself included)—sales of sake started to plummet in Japan, while sales of another alco-

holic drink, barely known to Westerners, started to go through the roof.

In 2003, in Japan, for the first time in 53 years, the production of shochu exceeded the production of sake (950,826 kilolitres to 856,376 kilolitres)—followed by the triumph of shochu sales over sake sales, as well. How times change! Once upon a time, the drinkers of shochu

were mostly old men (*oyaji*), sitting around, getting slammed in loud pubs (*izakaya*). Today, shochu is the hottest drink among young, upscale types in Tokyo, who are far more likely to go out drinking shochu than sake. The director of a big shop in Tokyo called Shochu Authority—which stocks 3200 different brands of shochu!—was quoted recently