



by Charles Marcanetti

Saito's Japanese Steakhouse

Authentic Kobe cooking, but not for everyone

Years ago, when I first reviewed Saito's, I raved about the wonderful sushi ... masago, ikura, salmon, tuna, salmon skin, etc. I can say, once again, that the sushi is exactly as it should be, fresh, moist, and correctly proportioned (more fish than rice). Back then I gave my "sushi restaurant caveat": when you walk into a sushi restaurant, if you smell fish ... walk out! At Saito's you'll only smell the aromas of the hibachi chef's creations, the fragrances of Asian spices, and the redolence of the simmering meats. That is, of course, if you sit at one of the hibachi tables ... if you dine on the other side of this beautiful restaurant, where the sushi is served (actually you can have sushi on either side), you'll only have the artistic presentations of the raw fish delicacies to whet your appetite. And whetted it shall be.

If you'll just take my word for it, I won't have to dwell on the great sushi in the remainder of this review. This go-around, I really want to concentrate on the hibachi.

Hibachi service today is not what it was when it was formulated. In 1863 the Japanese cooked their main meal on a small charcoal grill, the hibachi. And so it was for almost a hundred years until the West discovered it. It has long since evolved into a dining style. A communal table surrounds a large grill with a huge exhaust just above to suck up the smoke and steam from the flash cooking. There, the diners watch a master "hibachi" chef work wonders. Tragically, the chef has become recognized more as a mere entertainer than an entertaining master chef. Let me explain: I was raised in a restaurant family. I know how many years, how many burns, and how many knife cuts it takes just to become adequate at flash cooking. I know how many errors and wasted food and lectures (more like screaming tirades) it takes to have the nuances of proper cooking and presentation drilled into one's psyche. And so, when we are amused, impressed, or entertained by this seemingly easy food preparation, remember — it takes years and years of discipline and energy and frustrations and exhaustions to make it all look so easy. The flipping of the spatulas, the twisting of the knives, the rotating of

Saito's sushi is what and how sushi should be served. And since Saito's is a regular eatery for me, I can tell you it doesn't matter when you go, any day, any time ... the food is fresh and the service is professional.

When I went for my review dinner I was told they had real Kobe beef (not American or Australian). I was told that it was air-overnighted. "OK," I thought, "let's put it to the test." I've had Australian, good! I've had American, very good! Now I can say that I've had authentic Japanese Kobe. OMG! Now, listen. It is not for everyone because it is differently textured than even the



the food, the pushing here on the grill and then there on the grill, the oil fire flash, and the onion-volcano erupting show-stopper are not gimmicks. They're demonstrations of skill and examples of masterly training. If you keep this in mind your joy of watching your meal prepared before your eyes will be increased ten-fold. Then the actual eating will be more of a thank you to the chef than an end to a short dance.



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finest filet mignon, though every bit as soft, in fact, much softer, if you can imagine that. It has the consistency of savory melted butter – creamy smooth – juicy. I am a steak eater and I like to chew my meat. Kobe is incredibly delicious but softer than I would go out of my way for. It is not that Saito's has prepared it incorrectly; quite the reverse. All of my research tells me that Saito's prepared it exactly as it should be. For me though, even filet mignon is too soft. I prefer their scrumptious skirt steak hibachi. But for those of you who want to experience a true delicacy, I can recommend Saito's Kobe beef.

The manager, Duc, was gracious and balanced his perfectly timed visits with not being intrusive. A refreshing change from south Florida's sometimes overbearing attention. Duc let the food speak for itself, and it shouted "delicious." Our server, Sahapoom Yamsakul, of Thai heritage, must have written the book on how to properly attend to dining guests. But I reserve my highest accolade for Justin, our hibachi chef for the evening. He has been so well trained he makes the whole food preparation experience look easy, and that, dear readers, is incredibly difficult.

During the course of our dinner, we enjoyed Hero Sake, sake that I never had before and I consider to be a great find: superior to anything available as far as I can tell. It is ultra premium sake and is served hot or cold.

The dessert of fried ice cream, bananas and chocolate sauce topped off an evening of great food and great fun. 🍡

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