



Turning Japanese?

Kasha Van Sant discovers whether the Nobu Berkeley, renowned for its contemporary Japanese fusion eating, celebrity and decadence, lives up to its reputation

The initial signs were good. Polite door staff, polite coat attendants and even more polite hosts. All smooth, smiling and polished on the right side of Stepford. My guest and I were shown to a table where we could survey the buzz of the busy restaurant. Box number one - ticked.

Our utterly dedicated table waiter Yoram was extremely attentive and upon noting my pescatarian status did not hesitate to construct a menu accordingly. Armed with drinks: a glass of Sancerre 'La Vigne Blanche' 2007 (£7.50) and a small cold Hokusetsu Onikorashi Sake (£9.80), we were ready to sample. Appetisers came in the form of Yellowtail Sashimi with Jalapeno (£17.50) in its tangy citrus sauce and New Style Salmon Sashimi (£12.50). As an old school sashimi lover I loved the former, and the latter - seared salmon with olive oil and sesame seeds brought out the purist in me. Both were delicate and succulent, however. Tick number two.

Next was the dramatic Tuna Sashimi Salad (£15). The tuna was creamy and mouth-melting, salad leaves and white radish, crisp and light, and the onion and soy Matsuhiri dressing tied in the whole dish perfectly. The Rock Shrimp Tempura (£14.50) came with three sauces, Ponzu, Jalapeno and Spicy, perfect for dipping the hot bite-size shrimp into.

If I am to sing the praises of anything on Yoram's menu selection then the Black Cod Den Miso (£32) was pulling no punches. And neither would you after a 2-3 day marinade of Miso, Japanese lime and ginger. The resultant sweet, black, caramelised crust revealed milky flesh; in a word

— ethereal! Tick number three! With the fish and seafood taking centre stage, the Crispy Pork Belly with Spicy Miso (£12.50) was in danger of being overshadowed. Not so, moist to the point of disintegration and topped with chilli and chives, it hit the spot! Next was the wood oven's star dish, Cabbage Steak with Truffles (£15). Cooked in sake, smelling distinctly woody (funny that), layers descended from crisp to tender in one mouthful.

Finally a selection of sushi: Soft Shell Crab (£9 / piece); Yellowtail and Salmon (both at £3.50 / piece); and Spicy Tuna (£6.50 / piece). All in all the Soft Shell Crab was the hero of this ensemble — stunning!

I was ready to end my journey, but Nobu Berkeley had other ideas, in the shape of dessert! Namely the sublime After Hatchi Mint Brulee with Shiso Ice cream and Frozen Chocolate (£9.50). Palate cleansing and delicate this was 'wow' on a spoon and certainly more adult than it's English after dinner counterpart! Tick, tick, tick! Speaking of which the Nobu Chocolate Tart with Sake Kasu Ice cream and Hot Chocolate Sauce (£9.50) was a showy chocolate bomb which melted upon hot sauce impact. Kapow! Sweet, sticky and rich, a definite crowd pleaser!

So my meal was over and as an ardent Japanophile I could safely say this was an experience well worth repeating. ■

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