



EAT-JAPAN SUSHI AWARDS 2008

Event Results

Overview

The Sushi Awards 2008, held on the 6th of October 2008 saw 322 connoisseurs, food journalists and lucky members of the public gather in Bloomsbury's London House. They were there to pass judgement on the original creations of the world's best sushi chefs: The Seven Sushi Samurai. Together with a panel of expert judges, the guests cast their vote to determine which of the Samurai most deserved to win the prestige Sushi of the Year 2008 Award.



Winner

Mitsunori Kusakabe



Sushi Ran, California, USA

Born in Osaka, Japan in 1970, Kusakabe is a largely self-trained sushi genius who holds the 6th American Sushi Skills trophy. He has carried his skills around the globe before bringing them to his Michelin-starred restaurant, Sushi Ran in California. His choice of sushi demonstrated his skills as a chef and shows us how versatile rice can be.

Sushi of the Year 2008: Seven "Rice" Samurai - ecology -

Kusakabe used seven different methods (fermentation, frying, toasting, sautéing, roasting, freezing and extraction) to transform rice into an innovative sushi. Rice is the cornerstone of Japanese food, including sushi, and nothing was discarded or left to waste in the cooking process. The inspiration behind this sushi was Kusakabe's desire to show the world just how delicious and essential rice is to us. (See right for the image)

Ingredients:

Rice varieties, Oba leaves, Hanaso jiso, Sweet brown rice wine, Japanese sake, Dried bonito shavings, Hidaka kombu(kelp), Dried pickled plum (umeboshi), Hakata no shio salt, Pearl agar, White sesame, Nori, Rice bran oil, Lemon, colourless sushi ginger, Frozen raw wasabi

On his victory:

"I'm delighted to have won. I decided on my theme of Seven "Rice" Samurai -ecology" because ecology, and thinking about the environment, is an issue about which the entire world is concerned. So it seemed particularly appropriate for an international event like the EAT-JAPAN SUSHI AWARDS 2008. As for rice, the Japanese eat rice everyday – it's the cornerstone of our food culture. It's also said that rice is the heart of sushi, and I wanted to emphasize that. The seven techniques were chosen to demonstrate my skills as a chef, and to create distinct and disparate temperatures and textures."



2nd

Pontus Johansson

Pontus Sushi, Malmö, Sweden



This inventive and talented young sushi chef was selected as sole winner of the Nordic Sushi Championships from sushi bars across Scandinavia.



Dish: Northern Light

Pontus came up with a distinctively Swedish sushi, most notable for its inclusion of reindeer as its core component, alongside other unusual ingredients such as yoghurt, crème fraiche, Blenheim orange (Swedish autumn apple) and dried lingonberry, with an elderflower garnish.



3rd

Bryan Emperor

Mr. Jones, New York, USA



This flamboyant Wall Street banker recreated himself as a high-flying Japanese chef, winning the US Sushi Championship and wowing America with his unique culinary style.



Dish: Sakura Smoked Duck Sushi with Foie Gras and Balsamic Vinegar

With no fish featuring in this modern creation, Bryan gave his unusual choice of duck breast a distinctively Japanese flavour by smoking it in cherry blossom wood chips. egar work together to give this dish a unique gastronomic kick.



4th

Shinya Ikeda

Yumi, London, UK



Beginning his career in Japanese cuisine in Japan when he was 15, Ikeda has been head sushi chef at London's established Yumi restaurant since 2002.



Dish: Touch of Avant-Garde

While this sushi may have appeared more traditional than its ultra-contemporary competitors, this lightly grilled marinated salmon topping with its accompaniment of tosa-vinegar jelly and black olive gave it an edge of avant-garde-like innovation.



5th

Takayuki Nakamura

Otaru Masasushi, Hokkaido, Japan



Having dedicated almost his entire life to sushi making in Japan's seafood mecca, Hokkaido, this as yet undiscovered chef has honed his skills to the highest level.



Dish: Jewelly Fish

Smoked salmon, Dover sole and cod liver topped with cubes of cucumber, paprika and jelly gave this stunning sushi the appearance of a jewelled fish, with cucumber pieces for a tail.



6th

Silla Bjerrum

Feng Sushi, London, UK



The first-ever female chef to contest the Sushi Awards, Silla has been making sushi for 15 years, in both London and Tokyo. Silla is a co-founder of London-based chain Feng Sushi.



Dish: Cornish Mackerel with Danish Tamago Nigiri

Scandinavian influences of seasonal fish and vegetables were present in this sushi of line-caught Cornish mackerel with herbed egg 'stand' – a Danish version of tamago – alongside horseradish infused cucumber pickle.

7th (Absent)

Denis Yun

Yakitoriya, Moscow, Russia



Despite his youth, this talented chef at one of Russia's biggest names in sushi restaurants is two-time winner of the prestigious Sushi Skills Contest at the Moscow Food Show.



Dish: United Flavour

Despite the differences between Russian and Japanese cuisine, in this dish Denis aimed to find a unity. Using crab, salmon and sea bream, a Russian taste was incorporated with an essentially Japanese concept and tradition.

Please Note: Denis was unable to attend the Sushi Awards and EAT-JAPAN's Sushi Master Takanori Kurokawa from Soseki in London recreated this sushi with Denis's original recipe.

Guest Judges

Chairman of Judges



Pruth Leith, OBE

"At first I was skeptical that it (Kusakabe's winning sushi) would work – sushi with only rice! But on tasting it, all the flavours were there, everything, and the sweetness of the shiso flowers on the finish was simply gorgeous."



Jun Tanaka

Head Chef, Pearl

"Kusakabe's sushi stood out right from the start - it struck me as really different and exciting. On tasting it, I just knew that was the winning dish. It had everything you could want in one dish – a complete experience in a single mouthful."



Henry Harris

Chef Patron, Racine

"It was outstanding – without a doubt the showcase of the event. I'm also delighted to see a vegetarian dish win for the second year in a row." (Note: last year's winning dish the Golden Shooting Star was also vegetarian. Please see the press release for further details and an image)



Kyle Connaughton

Head Chef, The Fat Duck Experimental Kitchen

"It was technically brilliant - being able to create that dish in your own restaurant is one thing, but to do it here, in an unfamiliar environment, for 300 people is outstanding."



Nick Vadis

Chairman, The Craft Guild of Chefs/
Executive Chef, Compass Group

"I didn't realise rice could be so interesting – texture, flavour, heat, crunch, everything wrapped up in one small parcel. Amazing."

Event Details

Date: Monday 6th October 2008
Time: 18:00 – 21:00 (approx)
Venue: The Great Hall, London House, Mecklenburgh Square, London WC1N 2AB
Tickets: 300 tickets priced at £90 sold out and the event also had a waiting list. Attendees were food journalists, connoisseurs, press and members of the interested public.

Press Contact

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Event Organizer

EAT-JAPAN

The Sushi Awards 2008 was the centrepiece of EAT-JAPAN 2008, a four-month long nationwide celebration of Japanese food, drink and culture, running from July until October and organised by EAT-JAPAN. The Sushi Awards, now in its seventh year, aims to heighten awareness of and engagement with Japanese cuisine throughout the UK and was made possible by the generous support of the companies and organisations listed below.

EAT-JAPAN is a London-based company for the promotion of Japanese food, drink and culture in the UK via publications, online activities, events and more. For full information on EAT-JAPAN's activities, including details of the other EAT-JAPAN 2008 events and a comprehensive range of information on Japanese food and drink, please consult our website (www.eat-japan.com). Details can also be found in the EAT-JAPAN Magazine – Japanese Restaurant Directory.

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