

A MAN FOR ALL SEASONS

Japanese chef Hideaki Matsuo of Michelin-starred restaurant Kashiwaya has chosen Hong Kong as the home of his first overseas restaurant, serving his signature kaiseki meals with strictly seasonal ingredients.

STORY APPLE MANDY





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Japanese chef Hideaki Matsuo is confident his new restaurant Kashiwaya is going to be well received when it opens in Central's On Lan Street in mid-November. The upscale restaurant is Matsuo's first foray abroad and it mirrors its Osaka counterpart, serving traditional multi-course kaiseki meals.

"Some of my customers [at Kashiwaya in Osaka] are from here and since they understand and admire my creations, I thought of opening in Hong Kong to cater more to the local people," says the soft-spoken Matsuo.

The 28-seater Hong Kong restaurant's interior is reminiscent of its Osaka cousin, with sliding doors, shōji paper screens, and a Japanese-style waiting room.

Only two items are on the menu -- a seven-course lunch and a 10-course dinner. Each dish showcases Matsuo's seasonal specialties, from *amadai*, or grilled tilefish, in salted shrimp dip in the wintertime to steamed abalone in the spring. Every ingredient is selected to reflect the flavours of the seasons.

01 An assortment of seasonal appetisers, or *hassun*, served during winter

02 Signature desserts, or *kasane*, served at Kashiwaya

03 A variety of small dishes served during summer

04 Japanese chef Hideaki Matsuo of Kashiwaya in Osaka

"I LEARNED THE VALUES OF HONOUR AND FAITH, AND TO ALWAYS BE READY TO SERVE THE VERY BEST AS IF THERE IS NO TOMORROW."

But in a city where there's a limited supply of quality ingredients, Matsuo foresees a challenge in sourcing them. "If some ingredients are not available in Hong Kong, I am ready to adjust the menu in order to meet my standards," says Matsuo.

Matsuo's cuisine is essentially Japanese but he also employs modern techniques. For instance, for sake steamed clams, he uses *sakamushi* – a cooking style in which clams are steamed in sake with salt, to neutralise the umami flavours of the shellfish. He then combines the clams with a soup seasoned with sesame oil to create a milky texture.

Ise ebi, or spiny lobsters, are a favourite of Matsuo's. He mostly sources them from Ise in Mie Prefecture and soft boils them for three hours before serving. The result is a tender, melt-in-your-mouth dish that highlights the freshness of its ingredients.

The solid foundations of existence, such as tradition, event and season, are in danger of being washed away, and the chef is determined to stem the tide. "My cooking is about Japanese culinary traditions which we are beginning to lose," he says.

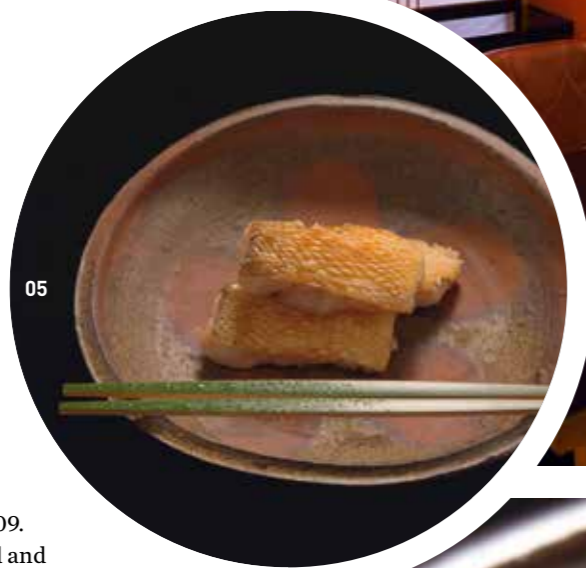
MATHEMATICS AND FOOD

Much of the restaurant's success is down to Matsuo's father, Tadanori, who set up Kashiwaya in 1977 and remained in charge until 1992 when his son took over as head chef. Building a reputation takes years and Kashiwaya first achieved its two Michelin star status in 2009. Matsuo recalls being delighted and surprised by the unexpected tribute to his cooking.

An additional star was awarded and Kashiwaya became a top-rated restaurant in *The Michelin Guide Kyoto Osaka Kobe 2011*. That same year, two members of Relais & Chateaux, which represents a select group of the world's finest restaurants, nominated him to become a part of the exclusive community. Since then, Kashiwaya has been a regular destination for connoisseurs of Japanese cuisine.

Unlike chefs who've cooked their way around the globe, Matsuo got his training the old-fashioned way. Born in Takatsuki City, Osaka, he developed a strong liking for the traditional Japanese tea ceremony at an early age. At 20, he began helping his mother conduct Japanese tea ceremonies in Kyoto's Daitoku-ji temple.

Matsuo continued with his efforts to master the elaborate performance art that constitutes the tea ceremony in his free time while studying theoretical physics at Kwansai Gakuin University. After graduating in 1986, he landed an apprenticeship at Shofukuro, a renowned ryotei restaurant in Higashiomi, Shigaken where the 23-year-old trained with head chef Hidetaro Nakamura for three years.



05 Amadai, or grilled tilefish

06 A private dining room in Kashiwaya, Osaka

07 The *hassun* is served with edible chrysanthème, available every October

08 Grilled Matsutake mushrooms

But Matsuo wanted to follow in his father's footsteps so he returned to his hometown and worked at Kashiwaya. A year after he took over as head chef he asked master craftsman Toshinori Nakamura to redesign the space to include traditional floor seating and a tea ceremony room. "It's not just the dishes but space also matters," he says.

Last year, Kashiwaya retained its three stars in *The Michelin Guide Kansai 2015*. Today, the majority of Matsuo's guests are prominent businessmen, and he regularly caters to customers with special dietary needs. His most memorable customer was a cancer patient who wanted to have his last meal at Kashiwaya.

And there was another. He recalls delivering a tailor-made bento box to an ailing regular customer who managed to eat the meal in his final hours. Matsuo says that, while it saddened him, it also gave him a sense of purpose.

"I learned the values of honour and faith, and to always be ready to serve the very best as if there is no tomorrow," says Matsuo. "I like to make my customers happy."

When not in the kitchen, Matsuo's activities include mentoring junior chefs, teaching new culinary techniques and contributing to regional revitalisation programmes. 🍷