



Wear It Now

The 10 Best Restaurants in New York 2012

BY ALAN RICHMAN |

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10. 15 East
15 East 15th St.
Manhattan

Sushi restaurants tend to offer formality, politeness, and pristine fish. That's not bad, but it's hardly heartwarming.

At 15 East, you'll encounter additional uncommon virtues: charm, generosity, and graciousness. The pleasure of a meal there begins with sushi chef Masato Shimizu. If encouraged, he will make a joy out of *omakase*, the Japanese sushi-counter dining that leaves all decisions in the hands of the chef. Shimizu loves to pull well-worn books from the shelf behind him, show photographs of fish to guests. (I think he's shown me the same cross-section of a bluefin tuna close to a half-dozen times.) He can make you laugh, too. At a recent meal, he presented a whole octopus to a giggling woman seated beside me and asked her to pick out the tentacle of her choice. She replied, "I don't know what one is better." He answered, "Neither do I."

The meal I ate that night was stunning and diverse. Too often a fellow who looks like me ends up with a pretty routine selection of fish when he sits down for *omakase*. My meal at 15 East opened with three stunning tastes—*uni* (sea urchin) over the creamiest imaginable tofu, braised Spanish octopus (maybe the best in the city), and squid marinated in miso. Then came chopped *toro* (fatty tuna) topped with a quail egg, an artistic presentation of sashimi (fish without rice), a single tempura-fried shrimp head (predictably crunchy and unpredictably delicious), a taste of cold soba, and, finally, a pageant of sushi.

That concluding lineup included mind-expanding *chu-toro* (medium-fatty tuna) and an eye-catching twosome of Japanese red snapper topped with a smidge of Japanese plum and Japanese golden-eye snapper with the paper-thin skin left intact. The cost of the meal was much less than I expected, and the quality of the fish was astonishing. There might be visiting Japanese industrialists who eat better fish in some midtown skyscraper, but 15 East offers everything in sushi I could ever desire.