



## Dining in Style

[By Anique Gonzalez]

Some of the best experiences are those that are simple. And enjoying a great meal with a loved one definitely falls into that category. However, the fact that the experience isn't as elaborate as jetting off for a weekend in Paris doesn't mean it will come cheaply. Enjoying a fabulous meal can come with a hefty price tag — just ask the patrons of New York's MASA.

MASA, located in the Time Warner Center of Columbus Circle in Manhattan and considered the country's most expensive restaurant, is named after famed chef Masayoshi Takayama. Takayama has a history of creating and serving exquisite food with prices to match. Before opening MASA, he operated one of the most expensive restaurants in Beverly Hills, California: a sushi restaurant called Ginza Sushiko.

When Takayama opened MASA in 2004, he chose a décor and ambiance that would symbolize the delicate cuisine that it serves. As Frank Bruni from the *New York Times* says in his food review, "MASA deals not in wide-angle splendor and broad-canvas fireworks but in tight close-ups and miniaturist flares. It prizes simplicity not only in its cuisine but also in its uncluttered environment, which keeps the focus on the food."

And what a focus it is. One of MASA's many unique features is the fact that the meals are omaske style. ("Omaske," translated from Japanese, means to "entrust" or "protect." Essentially, when the term is used in reference to sushi bars, it entails the chef preparing what he wishes instead of diners ordering items from a menu.) Thus, arriving at MASA you most likely will have the

feeling that you used to get on your birthday, knowing you had fantastic presents to open but not knowing exactly what awaited you.

In fact, even Takayama doesn't know what awaits his patrons. Each morning he takes inventory of all of the seafood he has obtained that day and determines what is best to serve. Bruni explains, "He receives shipments daily and whittles down what he receives to what he finds worthy." Containing only the best quality seafood, his daily shipments come from all over the world, including the United States, Europe, and Asia.



Dinner for two at this tiny 26-person restaurant can easily cost \$1,000 or more. The prix fixe menu, for instance, which starts at \$400 per person, does not include tax, the tip, or drinks. The dinner itself comprises nearly 30 courses and includes five appetizers, a sushi entrée with 20 different and exotic types of seafood, as well as dessert and tea. It should also be noted that due to the restaurant's size, reservations

must be made weeks or even months in advance.

Above all else, MASA is an experiential restaurant. As such, it thrives on details. Sake, once ordered, is delivered in a green glass bottle and paired with small hand-carved wooden cups, both of which were made especially for the restaurant. And, to reinforce the restaurant's Japanese heritage, many of the items used to create it, including wood, stone, and linen, came directly from Japan.

So, when eating your specially prepared pieces of horse mackerel, tuna tartare, or yellow tail while sipping a house-special yuzu cocktail, take a moment to truly appreciate the fact that you are enjoying some of the finest fish the world has to offer in one of the best cities the world has to offer.

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