

# Musashi Japanese Cuisine and Sushi Bar

I think I'm about to get in trouble with some dedicated sushi folk. But what the heck, that's how the fish flops.

I love Japanese cuisine and I also love the spirit of bonhomie that exists in a good neighborhood sushi bar. So, with apologies to Musashi regulars, I'm going public with their little secret — owner Richard Howard has a great sushi bar and a new location.

Howard is quick to give credit for much of his current success to his loyal customers, who claim he runs the best sushi restaurant in Oregon.

Four months ago — following a much-beanoed sushi hiatus after leaving his former location on G Street several months ago — the Japanese-trained chef opened his own restaurant.

"We begged him to open this restaurant," said one regular. "I've eaten in almost every sushi bar in the state of Oregon. His is the best."

Last Monday night, my dining companions and I decided to check out Howard's new digs — just two blocks off Seventh Street — and plopped ourselves down at the bar.

It was early, only 5 p.m., and there were

already several regulars champing at their chopsticks.

It turns out the regulars were eagerly awaiting the arrival of a rare sushi delicacy — the belly flap off a bluefin tuna.

This slab of top-of-the-line toro tuna, which Howard has only been able to procure a few times in his four years as a Grants Pass sushi chef, was on its way to Musashi's after a snowstorm-caused delay in Portland.

While the regulars jokingly contemplated ways to snare extra shares of the fatty fish from one another, I moved on to safer seas. After all, I'm a Musashi newbie.

A mini-train bearing three-piece sushi samplers (\$1.95 each) clacks its way on railroad tracks throughout the sushi bar. I chose a couple to share with my two dining companions — one experienced sushi-goer and one sushi bar first-timer.

## WORD OF MOUTH

DINING OUT WITH  
THE MAIL TRIBUNE NEWS STAFF

*Musashi Japanese Cuisine  
and Sushi Bar*  
314 S.E. H St., Grants Pass.  
Open for lunch Monday through  
Friday, for dinner Monday  
through Saturday.  
541-955-8848.

I also selected a side order of chicken gyoza (\$4). The fat, crimped dumplings were perfectly fried in soybean oil and served with a tasty dipping sauce.

Howard speaks proudly of his Japanese wife — the restaurant's kitchen chef. He ought to. She works wonders with the restaurant's non-sushi dishes.

For my aged and beloved first-timer (a.k.a. Mom), I ordered the shrimp and vegetable tempura. She loved the light and crispy batter-fried shrimp, sweet potato, onion and other veggies.

"Even a 92-year-old can have a new dining experience," she crowed.

For myself, I ordered my favorite Japanese comfort food — Agadashi Tofu (\$4). I love the large squares of melt-in-your-mouth tofu and the light soy broth infused with daikon radish.

My sushi-experienced dining companion ordered one of the house specials — the Dragon Roll (\$10).

Ooh!! The rich smoked eel, crispy tempura jumbo shrimp, fresh minced onions and pop-in-your-mouth bright green flying fish roe seemed wondrously exotic to me — as well as delicious. He offered to share, and probably regretted it. I ate four sections of the generously portioned 10-piece roll. It was soooooooooo good.

We jointly ordered the Musashi Combo (\$16). This served-in-a-boat 12-plus-piece combo was filled to the gunwales with assorted sushi favorites, sushi rolls and a tasty pickled salad with octopus rounds.

My only quibble with the whole operation is I was unable able to watch the chefs at work. I really enjoy watching the deft handwork involved in creating the varied and intricate sushi offerings. I wish that was possible at Musashi's, but the view is currently blocked. Maybe some day he'll let us watch (hint).

Meanwhile, the food is still fantastic, if less-than-visibly prepared.

And if Musashi's was the best kept sushi-bar secret in the valley, the secret is out now. If you want to see what all the fuss is about, my advice is to come early, order quick — and save a seat for me.

—Sanne Specht