



Bluefin Tuna Tataki with ponzu and wasabi salsa

Nobu Shoreditch

Nobu Hotel Shoreditch, London

Words: Harry McKinley

Looking at Nobu Shoreditch from the outside, one might think that a small cruise ship had run aground – its affluent passengers apparently unfazed and spilling out to revel in the increasingly polished delights of the neighbourhood. Great steel beams jut backwards from the building, and overhanging floor slabs form a tiered effect. Combined, they evoke the streamlined image of a vessel that could at some point raise anchor and plough on down Willow Street. It's the work of Ron Arad and Ben Adams Architects; the former known for flagrant creativity, the latter for clean functionality. The interplay between those two forces is evidenced in the final result, which Arad has publicly described as a 'relaxed version' of his original scheme.

Chef Nobu Matsuhisa founded his eponymous hospitality group with actor Robert De Niro in 1994, and whilst the focus was originally on standalone restaurants, the opening of the first Nobu Hotel in Las Vegas (2013) marked a new branch of the business and an opportunity for Matsuhisa to deliver an entire Nobu lifestyle that stretched beyond the dinner plate. Still, of course, F&B plays a dominant role and few, if any, Nobu hotel guests would book to stay without sampling the restaurant.

Nobu Hotel Shoreditch marked the first opening for

the brand in Europe, but across town in West London two standalone restaurants have proved enduringly popular, despite being less than 10 minutes walk from each other. By those standards, Shoreditch, in the east, might as well be a different country, and it remains to be seen if the area's markedly dissimilar – but increasingly less so – audience will take to the brand with quite the same enthusiasm. However, other recent openings in the neighbourhood, including The Curtain, The Ned and Devonshire Club, show that Shoreditch has cast off the last vestiges of its shabby-but-cool past and is now firmly on the mainstream visitor trail. Even locals are now more likely to work in banking than the creative industries. The arrival of Nobu in some ways highlights Shoreditch's ascension to peak gentrification – with the price of a meal for two at Nobu easily running into three figures.

Malibu-based Studio PCH helmed the design of the restaurant, having worked on numerous other Nobu venues internationally. Located in the hotel's basement, the 340m² space seats 240, including an 18-seat chefs table and 10-seat sushi bar. Like the rest of the hotel, the South American influences are relegated to the cuisine and the vision is one of muted minimalism. Sleek wood and bronze detailing



Photography: Claire Menary

are definitively Japanese in feel – with intricate joinery reflecting a sense of the Far East. More London, there are hints of Shoreditch’s industrial energy in the exposed concrete walls and pillars. But these are just hints, and on the whole the restaurant is as manicured as a bonsai.

Guests arrive via a grand floating staircase, from which they can observe the orderly rows of diners below. Five-metre tall glass doors to the outside terrace allow light to flood into what could otherwise have been a claustrophobic dining room, expansive ceiling height notwithstanding. At the core of the space is the bar, realised in a trapezoidal shape that adds an additional layer of dynamism to a design that is elsewhere focused, almost exclusively, on straight lines and soothing uniformity. Whilst other Nobus have played with eccentricity, and even extravagance, in their interiors – think Nobu Doha at the city’s Four Seasons – London has clearly dictated a sharper approach; the virile modern architecture of the Square Mile within touching distance.

Chef Matsuhisa made his name, of course, through his distinctive fusion of Japanese and Peruvian cuisine, with other South American influences thrown into the mix. At Nobu Shoreditch the menu doesn’t stray too far from the established. The Black Cod Butter Lettuce, a much-vaunted global favourite, retains its hallowed position, alongside the likes of dainty tacos with salmon and avocado, tempura shrimp and a searingly spicy Beef Toban Yaki. Nobu delivers to guests the closest to

comfort food they can expect from dishes grounded in Japanese cuisine – portion sizes aside. The distinctive combinations are its signature and, thanks to the brand’s growing ubiquity, difficult for others to emulate without being noticeably contrived.

The hotel worked with The Drinks Club on its alcohol programme, securing rare Japanese whiskies, including a Hibiki 30-year-old. In total the bar carries over 700 different spirits – all high-end and some exceptionally sought after. Sakes are from Hokusetsu, and the supplier, JFC, assisted in the training of staff to bring them up to speed on this most Japanese of beverages. Elsewhere, Boutique Brands helped the hotel in the creation of its own liquors for cocktails, whilst also selecting brands for the back bar from its niche portfolio, including Sette Vie Amaretto. On the wine front, Bibendum Wine supplied the hotel’s diverse collection which includes a bottle of Screaming Eagle 1998.

For Nobu Hotels the future means expansion and, whilst London was the brand’s first European outpost, a recent opening in Ibiza has put the flag firmly in the sand. To come, a slate of openings from Riyadh and Marbella, to Toronto and Barcelona. And whilst the brand may be known for its very particular concept, it is also demonstrating that it’s capable of enough diversity to sustain a future beyond the Black Cod.

www.nobuhotelshoreditch.com

IN A BITE Covers: 240 • Operator: Nobu Hospitality • Head Sushi Chef: Noriyoshi Teruya • Tableware: Nobu Matsuhisa Original • Uniforms: Ted Baker • Drinks Suppliers: Boutique Brands, JFC, Bibendum