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The Story of Wasabi

Domo a "B" Rank Gourmet Restaurant

Koi Nobori; Japanese Carp Kites

Check Out Our Chopsticks

by Gaku Homma, Domo owner and head chef

The Story of Wasabi

When I first came to the United States, I believed that "chicken fried steak" was made from chicken and that "buffalo wings" came from buffalo. I believed this for a very long time before I figured out that these were just names for these foods and did not necessarily reflect the ingredients! I know that not only me, but many foreigners in the United States were also puzzled by "rocky mountain oysters" and "bulldog" sauce! Luckily I discovered that there are no bull dogs in "bulldog" sauce; it is just the name of a brand of steak sauce!

The same is true for Americans familiar with Japanese sushi served in the United States. I have news for you about "wasabi" that you might find surprising!

What everyone calls wasabi, the spicy condiment served with sushi in the United States is actually not real wasabi. What is normally found in sushi bars in the United States is horse radish powder mixed with additives and green food coloring. Before it is served, this horse radish powder is mixed with hot water and served as wasabi.

Real wasabi is made from the Japanese plant *Wasabia japonica*, which grows on the banks of fresh mountain streams. When I worked for the Lake Towada Folk Art Museum, I used to go deep into the forests with

the locals to gather these prized plants growing near the cold water stream beds. When found, these plants were carefully uprooted and brought back down to the village. The thumb size roots we sold to a local hotel for a hefty sum, and the leaves and stalks were boiled by the locals and eaten with soy sauce. The greens are very spicy but have a wonderful flavor.

Real wasabi root costs at least 10 times more than the imitation and would be quite a costly item for regular sushi bars that use a lot of wasabi paste. Real wasabi is ground on a grinder made of shark skin and served fresh in very small amounts.

Some restaurants do not use powdered horse radish but make their own wasabi from ground horse radish, additives and food coloring to turn it a moss green color. This is also not real wasabi

I hope I have not disappointed those who have thought the wasabi paste they had enjoyed at the sushi bar was real wasabi, but to show your knowledge as a sushi connoisseur, this is a handy bit of information to have for your next visit to the sushi bar!

Written by

Gaku Homma, Domo Owner and Head Chef

Domo, a “B” Rank Gourmet Restaurant

“B” Rank Gourmet is a term used in the Japanese restaurant business in Japan. This term is used for restaurants that feature more local, traditional foods; every day fare made from locally harvested ingredients and cooked with local recipes. “B” rank gourmet restaurants are not fancy restaurants; they reflect the home-style heritage and environment of the local people of Japan. Restaurants that are considered “A” rank gourmet in Japan are restaurants that serve foods like sushi and other special delicacies that are not eaten every day but are enjoyed for special occasions.

From the 80’s until a few years ago, Japan enjoyed a period of great affluence, which marked an era of excessiveness in Japan. Everything under the sun, from all parts of the world became available to citizens of Japan, including every food imaginable.

Recently however, Japan has suffering from the same economic downturn as the most of the rest of the world, and the Japanese people have begin to return to a liking of simpler, more traditional Japanese foods. Restaurants serving local foods have seen a resurgence in popularity, and even local governments have sponsored campaigns and contests to promote the local fares of their regions. This trend has become a popular theme for the tourism trade, with tourists traveling to different prefectures and towns to sample the foods produced in local areas.

Most Japanese restaurants in Colorado are “A” rank gourmet in style and serve mostly sushi or other Japanese special occasion foods. Many of these “A” rank gourmet restaurants serve exotic dishes such as maguro tuna sushi (for over \$10.00 for two pieces), or delicacies like giant clam sushi for an even higher price! The value for the price is a concern and so is the fact that both of these species are becoming endangered. For this reason alone, neither of these are served at Domo Restaurant.

These “A” rank gourmet restaurants enjoy a popularity as places to go for Japanese food, but what most American’s don’t know is that by any means, sushi is not eaten in Japan every day or even some days; it is a specialty item eaten occasionally for special occasions.

Since its inception, Domo’s full name has always been named “Domo Japanese Country Foods Restaurant”, and has always

been a “B” rank gourmet restaurant. Domo has a menu, cooking style and taste unique to Colorado and has been named the “Best Traditional Japanese Restaurant” in Colorado for the past 17 years.

One of Domo’s specialties is *nabemono* or traditional Japanese pot dishes. At Domo you have a choice of broth for this dish, and two of the favorites are a *sakekasu* (soy bean husk) broth or a *tonyu* (soybean milk) broth that cannot be found in other Japanese restaurants in Colorado. Domo also serves over 50 varieties of traditionally prepared root and leafy vegetable, seaweeds and bean side dishes that reflect not only Japanese tradition but the bounties and colors of the seasons.

At Domo, all of our foods are carefully prepared and we are probably the only Japanese restaurant in town that does not provide soy sauce, salt or pepper on your table! We want you to enjoy the foods the way they were meant to be prepared, and carefully season them for you!

A variety of side dishes are served with both lunch and dinner entrees at Domo. These side dishes are complimentary at Domo, but would cost about \$4-\$7 each per serving at other “A” rank Japanese restaurants in Denver. For the dinner meal, seven of our famous Domo side dishes are served “family style” for your table to share; just like they would be served at the family dinner table at a home in Japan. Besides being delicious and plentiful, Domo’s side dish service makes the meal an experience, one that tends to bring the table together.

At Domo we have just introduced new noodle menus for lunch and dinner that feature over 50 ramen, udon and soba noodle combinations. All of these special noodle dishes are prepared with Domo’s own unique style and ingredients and have already become a popular favorite!

We wish everyone a Happy New Year in 2011 and promise to continue our tradition of proudly preparing and serving Domo’s own unique “B” rank gourmet Japanese country food cuisine!

Thank you,
Gaku Homma, Domo Owner and Head Chef

Koi Nobori, Japanese Carp Kites

May 5th, 2011

It has been almost two months since the great earthquakes and tsunami hit Northern Japan on March 11th, 2011.

Today the situation in Japan is stabilizing and the rebuilding has begun. Thank you very much for all of your continued support during these very challenging times.

In Japan, on this day, May 5th, especially in the areas most affected by the disaster, the Koi Nobori, or carp kites are flying. The carp kites are part of a traditional May celebration for children, a celebration of spirit and determination. The Koi Nobori are flown to invoke a strong spirit in all the children of Japan; especially this year.

At Domo Restaurants, Koi Nobori carp kites are flying high in the Domo Gardens as a symbol of our best wishes to all of the children of Japan to remain strong and determined with renewed sense of hope. Especially for the children directly affected by the disaster, the Koi Nobori carp kites



will be flying at Domo for the next few weeks. Domo is the only place in Denver where such a large collection of Koi Nobori can be seen. We invite you to come by and see these beautiful symbols of youth and springtime in Japan.

Gaku Homma

Domo Restaurant Owner

Founder of Nippon Kan and AHAN (the Aikido Humanitarian Active Network)

Check out our chopsticks!

Domo has a new message for our customers on our website, in our restaurant and even on our chopsticks wrappers. Check it out and 'Dine at Domo and Feed the World'

Domo Restaurant is housed in Nippon Kan Culture Center, a 501 3 Federal non-profit organization first established in 1978 and plays an important role in the overall cultural and humanitarian purposes of the center.

Currently Nippon Kan's local and international cultural and humanitarian efforts are conducted through AHAN (The Aikido Humanitarian Active Network). Nippon Kan AHAN supports projects world-wide and Domo is a primary sponsor for all AHAN activities. Two of our many projects include supplying one ton of rice per month for two orphanages in Bangladesh and locally, 'eighteen years of consecutive service and 50,000 meals served to the homeless at the Denver Rescue Mission.

More information on all of AHAN's many project in other countries like Nepal, the Philippines, East Timor, Mongolia, Guatemala, Mexico, Turkey, and more can be found on the Nippon Kan website at www.nippon-kan.org. Proceeds from every meal served at Domo are used to help fund these many projects world-wide. I hope that this year too, our customers and friends at Domo will continue to support our efforts with your patronage.