

Title:

WaSa's fresh take on sushi

Word Count:

803

Summary:

The restaurant brings 'new generation' flavors to Irvine, Newport Beach

Keywords:

Dining, Restaurant, Irvine, Newport Beach, Orange County

Article Body:

It's 7:30 on a Tuesday night, and 20 people are waiting to get into WaSa Sushi and Japanese Re

Good sign.

They're chatting happily outside in the winter chill of a shopping center parking lot in Irvin

Another good sign.

Businessman Bronnie Lee and chef James Hamamori have a hit with their ''new generation'' sushi

For fans, it's the novelty of what Hamamori's doing with sushi and other Japanese fare that de

That novelty comes to life with the ''WaSa Treasures,'' a list of 16 plates that take two-piec

That Tuesday night, I grabbed four of the treasures at carry-out and hustled them home. I love

My wife, who is no fan of sauces on any food, turned thumbs down. She just objected to the sau

The same thing happened when I took three colleagues to lunch two weeks later. One is a relati

We sat at the bamboo sushi bar and settled into the cool room, which is painted in pastels and

''Nice room,'' said the aficionado, who is a designer. When our first course arrived, she humm

''Wow,'' the newcomer said, after biting into the seared yellowtail with jalapeño. The other t

''This is fantastic, a great place for people who are a little unsure of sushi,'' the newcomer

And that set the devotee on a mission to see if the traditional sushi menu could stand up to h

She tried the salmon skin roll (baked salmon skin, cucumber, radish, bonito flakes, \$3.75), pr

The lobster roll (steamed lobster, smelt egg, avocado, asparagus and mayo wrapped in soy paper

We took a side trip to the spicy tuna tartar when we spied a waitress carrying an order to an

The mound of raw tuna is piled into a tower, topped with avocado and a spicy sauce, all set on

It was gorgeous, and we admired it on the plate for a full beat before we dove in.

''I'm not sharing this,'' the newcomer blurted out, though he had no choice. The aficionado an

After a few more exotic wanderings, the devotee wrapped up with kaki -- an oyster shooter -- a

We all agreed that WaSa was a lively, fun place and that the sushi and other offerings ranged

That's what Lee was shooting for when he opened the first WaSa in the Irvine Market Place shop. Hamamori worked his way up and through the Los Angeles sushi scene before Lee lured him to Irvine. "There was just nothing like what we do going on in Orange County," said Lee, an Irvine resident. After opening a small, traditional-sized sushi bar in Irvine, they added a tonier take in the area. But it's the sauces and the style that they're most proud of. "We're adding another layer of flavor," Lee said. It's just what WaSa's fans love.

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