

THE Montrealer



📷 Chef-owner Kimio Nguyen behind the sushi bar on Laurier. Photo: Mike Cohen

Mikado Montreal celebrates 30 years of serving some of the best sushi in town

Restaurant Rap

There was a time not too long ago when I did not particularly care for sushi. We'd go to a sushi restaurant or pick it up for home and I'd generally order chicken or salmon teriyaki. However, while frequenting the popular Mikado Restaurant (www.mikadomontreal.com), I gradually developed a taste for this amazing Japanese favorite.

Mikado first opened its doors in 1987 on St. Denis Street and followed that up with another locale on Laurier Street near Hutchison. The latter relocated to a new and larger space eight years ago. Chef-owner Kimio Nguyen introduced an NDG locale on Monkland Avenue in 15 years ago.

Kimio is naturally very proud of what he has built. He was born in Vietnam and moved to Montreal as a youngster. He caught on to sushi in the 1980s when the food started to become very trendy.

After all of my years as a loyal customer, I contacted him about doing a story on his operation and he generously invited us to Laurier to carry out a review. This locale is the largest of the three, with seating for up to 140 people, including 16 at the sushi bar. In NDG, there are 50 seats, a sushi bar for six and a seasonal terrace for 12. The St. Denis location is not operated by Kimio and his partners Liem Tran and Thinh Pham (aka Sushi Man). "It is still in the family," he says of the 54 seat venue, with space for six at the sushi bar and 12 on the terrace.

I see Liem and Sushi Man often when I do my regular pickups at Mikado Monkland.

Kimio says that three basic elements underpin Mikado's philosophy: creativity, simplicity and balance. Creativity to dazzle with original dishes; simplicity to allow for the experience of full unadulterated flavours; and balance to beautifully bring together tastes, textures, ingredients and colours. The attention to detail and aesthetics is reflected in the decor and even in the use of hand-made tableware. With all this in mind, Mikado tries to fulfil the needs and desires of its customers. And for those with a taste for the unknown and the wildly creative, the chefs at Mikado will gladly prepare special dishes to delight your whims and fancies on the spot.

For dinner we began with two appetizers we never tried before: the pizza, containing a rice cake with tuna, smoked salmon and fried shrimps and the roasted miso-marinated black cod, which came with some of the most deliciously prepared vegetables I have tasted in a long time. Before our main course we share the Mikado Salad, something I only tried for the first time a few months ago. The house dressing adds a superb taste. We usually have the Ebi Gyoza (homemade shrimp and shitake dumplings with soy sauce) and the tempura appetizer (deep fried shrimps and vegetables, served with tempura sauce), but on this occasion we needed to save room for the main course.



Liem Tran and Sushi Man at the Monkland location.



The miso-marinated block cod come as an appetizer

Now it was on to choose from the wide array of maki sushi selections. We settled on the Happy Roll, Relax, Anzie, Kamikase and the NDG. The Happy features tuna dynamite, cucumber and shiso, with slices of avocado and eel on the top. As for the Anzie, it contains rice paper, shrimps, crab, Masago, asparagus, lettuce, almonds, miso sauce and grilled scallops. My personal favorite at Mikado has always been the NDG, with tuna dynamite, tempura, avocado and green apples. It is wrapped in rice paper and served with homemade spicy sauce. The kamikaze includes spicy fresh fish, tempura flakes, cucumber and lettuce.

For dessert we enjoyed the tarte Mikado, which was perfect to split in two. You can view the entire menu in detail on their website.

Keep in mind that the Mikado's take-out and delivery menu features the same local and seasonal products as the restaurant menu. Orders can be made in person, over the phone or online. Mikado also has a very successful catering service for receptions, weddings, office parties and other occasions. They can provide a partial service to complement another caterer's menu, or a sushi bar service.

The 399 Laurier West location is open Monday to Friday from 11:30 am to 2:30 pm and evenings from 5:30 pm to 10 pm Monday to Wednesday, 5:30 pm to 11 pm Thursday to Saturday and 5:30 pm to 10 pm Sundays. For reservations call 514-279-4809. The NDG 5515 Monkland locale is open Tuesday to Friday from 11:30 am to 2:30 pm and evenings from 5:30 pm to 10 pm Tuesday to Thursday and Sunday and 5:30 pm to 11 pm Saturdays. For reservations call 514-369-3659. The 1731 St. Denis location is open from 11:30 am to 2:30 pm Tuesday to Friday, 5:30 pm to 10 pm Monday to Thursday, as well as Sunday and 5:30 pm to 11 pm Friday and Saturday. For reservations call 514-844-5705 or e-mail stdenis@mikadomontreal.com.

Kimio has three sons aged 24, 23 and 16 whom he hopes will join him in the business in the years to come. His eldest, Phinh, is studying business at school and already helps out at the Laurier location.