

New balance

East meets west as Cristina Sato of Japanese restaurant Yamato in Johannesburg comes up with a tuna tartare to go with the Sumaridge Chardonnay 2007. **Andrea Burgener** reports.



When we asked Cristina Sato from Yamato – arguably Johannesburg's most revered Japanese dining space – to find us a match for Sumaridge's highly rated 2007 Chardonnay, she delighted us with her enthusiasm.

Sato is one of those multi-tasking, hands-on owners who – though she isn't actually making every meal herself – is ultimately the director behind every dish here, and a brilliant cook herself. Hers is also one of the few local Japanese eateries to offer a menu with interesting and very successful wine matches, not always an easy task with either classic or contemporary, fusion-style Japanese dishes.

Sato excitedly ran off a number of options which she thought might hit the mark, including her seafood miso broth and a modern Japanese salmon tartare. Surprise us, I told her.

After a period of reflection, she decided that the wooding in the Sumaridge, subtle though it is, demanded something with a little toastiness itself; something with just a little more bass and less treble than the ultra-clean and clear flavours most of her classic Japanese numbers offered.

Her eventual choice, Maguro Yukke (tuna tartare) had me in ecstasy. The dish has its roots in Korea, which means that the crisp, light Japanese elements are fused with warm, round, signature Korean flavours of sesame oil and seeds, plus just the most polite hint of garlic (of course the garlic and oil would have been a heady hit in the Korean original, and would probably call for something closer to a pint of beer!).

I have to say Sato's mention of the sesame oil had me sceptical before tasting the two together – this oil can have such a very bizarre effect on many drinks, even good old H₂O. But here, used with subtlety, the oil works brilliantly (and I can't overemphasise how brilliantly!) with the slight wood in the wine, shifted as it is by the soy, and the sharpness of spring onion and ginger.

The Sumaridge is an incredibly subtle Chardonnay; every element, from the fruit to the wood, is understated, with no aspect clouding another. Just as with this truly wondrous little Korean-Japanese dish. Extreme balance, if there is such a thing. Happy bedfellows indeed!

Andrea Burgener is a food writer and chef. She owned and ran the Johannesburg restaurants Superbonbon and Deluxe, and has also worked as a food stylist, television food presenter and restaurant consultant.

MAGURO YUKKE (TUNA TARTARE)

Serves 4 people

YUKKE SAUCE

100ml best-quality Japanese soy sauce

30g sugar

30ml good sake

30ml mirin (Japanese cooking wine)

6g grated ginger

6g grated garlic

Put all ingredients into a small pot and simmer for 10 minutes. Strain and allow to cool. Keep whatever you're not using in an airtight container in the fridge.

INGREDIENTS

240g sashimi-grade tuna

24g finely chopped spring onion

1 t best-quality Japanese soy sauce

(Sato only uses the Kikkoman still made in Japan but, realistically, any Kikkoman will be a good bet)

1 t good-quality sesame oil

¼ t seven spices (optional, available from most Asian supermarkets)

4 t Yukke sauce (see above)

4 leaves lettuce for under the

tartare (butter lettuce works well)

A sprinkling of lightly roasted white

sesame seeds for each portion (dry fry in pan, watching carefully, until just golden)

Hand-chop the tuna, slightly more coarsely than for beef tartare. Don't even think about putting it into a processor or mincer: you'll end up with a paste.

Mix the chopped tuna with all the ingredients except the lettuce and seeds.

Line plates or shallow bowls with the lettuce (and, if you like, some finely julienned carrot and sliced avocado).

Sprinkle with the seeds and serve immediately.

NOTE: for a standing menu, this tartare is great served in smaller (bite-sized) baby gem or cos lettuce leaves, so that the lettuce becomes both scoop and wrapping for each bite of tartare. ■

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Cristina Sato: the enthusiastic, multi-tasking, hands-on owner of Yamato.