

Sushi Samurais Battle for Top Sushi Honor
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Published: Thu Nov 1, 2007

Sushi epicures gathered at the Sushi of the Year 2007 competition at London House for the ultimate sushi fix last Tuesday night.

On the menu were seven nigiri dishes prepared by top sushi chefs – collectively billed the ‘Seven Sushi Samurai’ – who competed for the sushi world’s highest honour.



Now in its sixth year, the challenge attracts global competitors from Michelin-starred restaurants such as Nobu, as well as an impressive lineup of judges. **Kyle Connaughton**, guest judge and head chef of development at **Heston Blumenthal**’s famed Fat Duck restaurant was keen to participate: “We are influenced by Japanese technique at the Fat Duck,” said Connaughton. “We are always looking to Japanese food-science to enhance our cuisine.”

Visiting gourmards also had the chance to sample each nigiri and cast their votes alongside the judges – but not before cleansing their palettes with some shochu highballs, of course. ASW member [Lini Kuhl](#) was amongst those grazing on the spreads. “I’m looking forward to trying a new combination that isn’t usually in sushi,” she said, adding that she was eyeing Nobu chef **Yasuhiro Mineno**’s Scottish beef nigiri with miso marinade and a dab of English mustard.

The event highlights an interesting foodie conundrum: on one hand, sushi represents the value of tradition and simplicity in cuisine. But to Japanese sushi chefs working abroad, being inventive is a necessity as traditional materials are often scarce.



Sushi's global popularity also means that non-Japanese chefs are integrating their own cultures and regional ingredients. **Andrei Sim**, chef at Moscow's Planeta Sushi, for example, wowed the crowd with 'Red Square,' a nigiri sushi consisting of red flesh tuna with mirin gelee on a cream cheese and beetroot sushi rice base.

Sushi innovation triumphed in the end when **Masashi Ogata** was crowned the event's winner. The chef had intended to use shark fin in his 'Golden Shooting Star' sushi. Unable to find quality shark fin in London, Ogata recreated the taste and texture using vegetarian ingredients such as daikon sprouts, maple syrup-infused apple and cornflakes.



Masashi Ogata preparing sushi



Seven Sushi Samurai chefs



Masashi Ogata accepting his award

"It was absolutely unlike sushi I've had anywhere else," said novelist Tobias Hill on the winning sushi. Hill, who described his first taste of sushi in 1987 as "one of the most alien things [he] had ever eaten at that point," should know, since he is now familiar with the London sushi scene. "Nobu is lovely, although a little trendy," he said. "But this [Golden Shooting Star] sushi is a surprise."