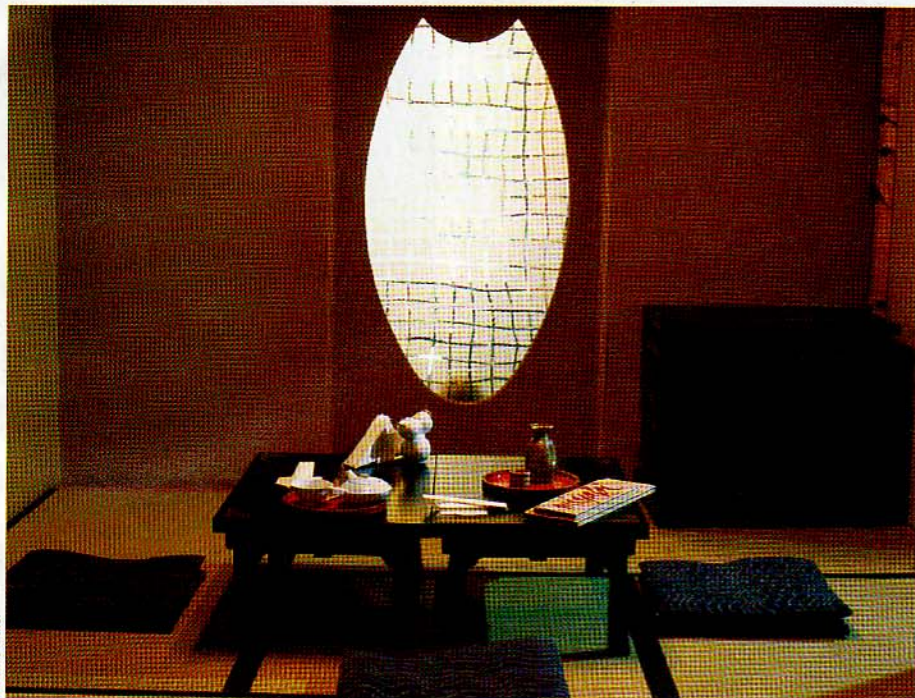


Japanese oasis in the rush of Prague



Jakub Stadler

MIYABI

Navrátilova 10, Prague 1
Open Mon-Fri 11 a.m.-11 p.m. Sat & Sun
noon-11 p.m.
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Although just a few steps from busy Vodičkova street and well-established, the restaurant Miyabi has always been somehow hidden, even though its services are not limited only to the restaurant and tearoom. The venue also organizes various cultural events such as exhibitions, presentation of Japanese culture, workshops and other art events. The Japanese restaurant, founded by a Czech Japanophile, is situated in a calm area near the New Town Hall. It has a very good reputation among Prague's connoisseurs of Japanese food and admirers of a modest and peaceful atmosphere.

However, that was not the case when we came to test the establishment. For our visit we chose Monday lunchtime and immediately on entering we knew this would not be a quiet tea party. It was already too cold to sit in the outside courtyard and the cubicles furnished with traditional tatami mats, on which customers sit, were occupied by a group of Japanese tourists. We had to sit in the front room, which is designed as both a restaurant and a tearoom.

Not that we minded: it was calmly and sensitively furnished without unnecessary decorations but still cozy and friendly.

The front room of the restaurant brought to mind a lively beehive. Apart from a couple of businessmen in suits and an elegant elderly Japanese lady, there were also two noisy guys with even noisier mobile phones ringing all the time. There was also a young couple with a screaming baby whose mother was visibly annoyed that she was not allowed to change its diaper on the table next to eating guests.

In spite of all this, we were pleased to note the professional approach of the staff, which was relaxed, quick and witty and willing to help for the entire time of our lunch. To start by warming ourselves up we asked for sake (Kč 180), which came in warmed and stylish ceramic pots.

The restaurant's menu is not only composed of a choice of more than 50 kinds of sushi but also a wide variety of other traditional Japanese specialties. For those who are confused after inspecting a long list composed of poetic Japanese expressions there is also a guide with photographs of all dishes available. To try a mixture of classic specialties, one can choose one of numerous degustation menus that start at Kč 195.

For the first course we ordered maki-mono sushi mix (Kč 670) combined with

Evaluation

COMMENDABLE:

Cozy atmosphere, helpful staff, great sushi for good prices.

NEEDS IMPROVEMENT:

Web site could be used to promote cultural events.

a set of avocado maki (Kč 110). The makizushi pieces, sushi rolled inside seaweed, which came to the table beautifully arranged were not only fresh looking but also a real culinary experience. The dish comprised of a generous 30 piece-portion of California maki, with crab, avocado and cucumber; tekka maki, with tuna; sake maki, with salmon; unagi maki, with eel and cucumber, and kappa maki, with cucumber. As is customary in good Japanese restaurants, the sushi came with a small portion of pickled ginger, hot green wasabi and a pot of quality soy sauce. After finishing, we decided to try one of the noodle dishes and ordered tempura udon (Kč 280), traditional Japanese noodles in fine bouillon with vegetables and seaweed accompanied with shrimp fried in tempura batter. Considering its price, it was not the best choice because the taste of bouillon was so fine that it was almost undetectable. Even the traditional spicy seasoning, which we were served to be added according to taste, did not help to improve it much. Also, the batter on the shrimps did not remain as crispy as we would have preferred but instead started to swell in the soup.

Fortunately, the end of our lunch was improved by what they call can cocktail: a refreshing lemonade made from limes and perfectly sweetened. For dessert we had an absolutely delicious green tea sorbet (Kč 65), which came in a bowl decorated with fresh mint leaves. Though it was necessary to wait a while before it started melting it was definitely worth it. As a result we left satisfied and determined to repeat the visit soon. Miyabi proved to be a great place not only for a wide choice of sushi without the high price tag typical at some of the popular sushi places in Prague but also for its friendly and totally unpretentious atmosphere. ■

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