

## Makan Time

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### BTO: Japanese additions

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#### Japanese additions

*One's a top Tokyo brand and the other is a neighbourhood eatery, but both these new Japanese restaurants have something in common - they differ from the norm. By Audrey Phoon*

Kitagawa Japanese Restaurant  
1 Orchid Club Road  
#02-02 Driving Range  
Tel 6852-0128

THE probability of finding a decent Japanese restaurant in the heartlands used to be as unlikely as discovering a piece of otoro in the fish section of a neighbourhood wet market. That is, until Kitagawa opened in Yishun recently.

To be more specific, the restaurant - located within the driving range of Orchid Country Club - began business two weeks ago. Yet it's already attracting a steady stream of diners, and not just golfers at that: at lunch on Tuesday, for example, the restaurant was more than half-full with people in office attire who were obviously there to eat, not hit, buckets.

What's drawing them is the fact that Kitagawa offers decently done and reasonably priced gourmet goodies such as wagyu tatakai (\$60.50 per 100g) alongside house specials like braised sharkfin with chawanmushi (\$20.50) and deep-fried sole salad (\$18.50). A must-try is the kajiki nabe (\$15), a tasty broth containing melt-in-the-mouth blue marlin belly in a claypot.

There's also a sizeable selection of sushi (including otoro) and sashimi, which is not surprising once you realise that the restaurant's head chef, Marcus Yan, used to work for sushi guru Yoshio Nogawa. He's also chalked up stints at Tatsu Sushi at Chijmes, and Kihana in Jakarta.

Yan is not the owner of Kitagawa though - two first-time restaurateurs are. Pals Sandy Wong and Jimmy Woo are from completely different industries - she's an artist who won the UOB Painting of the Year award in 1986, he runs a family business - who both decided to 'follow our passion for food' by opening a restaurant, recession notwithstanding.

Understandably, because of their relative inexperience in the F&B industry, they've given Yan a free hand with the food, which means he is able to buy and serve whatever he wants within reason. So Kitagawa's ingredients are 'all from Japan', claims the chef, who adds that the food is brought in thrice a week from Tokyo's Tsukiji Market and Fukuoka. 'Sometimes (the owners) scream when they see the invoices, but the costs are secondary - customers must firstly be satisfied,' he says half-jokingly.

Ms Wong and Mr Woo have also splashed out on renovating and decorating their 102-seat restaurant to the tune of half a million dollars, which shows up in the form of a hand-assembled ceiling comprising stylised orchid-shaped wood panels; solid wooden floors; and humongous gurgling water-feature vases. In addition, there are both indoor and outdoor dining areas as well as counter seats, two tatami rooms and a VIP room. The latter is set apart from the rest of the restaurant and has a private entrance plus its own LCD TV and karaoke set, should the food make you want to sing.

Yan says the aim of the restaurant is to make diners feel comfortable and special, and he plans to help them along by, say, sneaking extras into their bento boxes if they order the sets, or whipping up special finger food items for those seated at the sushi counter.

No doubt those little touches will continue to bring in customers - and if they don't, the free parking will.

Posted by The Singapore Mum at Monday, June 01, 2009

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