

The Star-Ledger

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Yumi in Sea Bright a Jersey Shore gem



1120 Ocean Ave.
(732) 212-0881
www.yumirestaurant.com

Hours:

Lunch, noon-3 p.m.

Monday-Saturday

Dinner, 5 p.m.-10 p.m.

Sunday-Thursday

5 p.m.-11 p.m.

Friday and Saturday



The black cod on your plate is the color of the moon on a murky night, opaque yet deep and mysterious, and with a slight blush remaining from the kiss of the sun.

You may already know that black cod is a delicacy, fat and sweet, but at Yumi in Sea Bright, it's a delicacy in proper hands. Lush is not an adequate word. Transcendent? Mystical?

Chef Shuenn Yang skillfully offsets the black cod by an even more mysterious black seaweed, so dark, so alluring, with such a unique startle of brine and texture that you think perhaps it also harbors a secret or two from the deep.

We almost missed this dish – it's not exalted appropriately on the menu -- but we were sold when the waitress confirmed our choice with a knowing smile, pointing out that her daughter could eat the black cod twice a day and never want for anything else.

Nor will you. The miso black cod (\$16) is, without doubt, revelatory, a game-changer, a dish for your bucket list.

Yumi has been here nine years (shut down by Hurricane Sandy but reopened seven months later), and its menu represents a strong list of well-honed success stories. If you live here, you will respect its neighborhood fame. If you don't live here, you will be unexpectedly charmed, sushi to dessert. This crisp but



unassuming restaurant in this sleepy, well-heeled seashore town is among the most dynamic restaurants in the state, a rival to those with the fancy big-name chefs and the professional public relations teams. Indeed, it may seem better because it doesn't have either.

(It also seems better thanks to the genuine friendliness of the staff; these, clearly, are people who care about their work.)

Everything we ordered was distinct, from the bold, magenta-colored organic salmon filet (\$17) with its crisp glaze of ginger and soy, to the wasabi-peas crusted scallop (\$13), buttery and sweet and lounging about on a lush bed of cauliflower puree.

Cashew prawns (\$15) were fun, the nuts pounded to small bits to become a tempura-

like crust, offering a textural counterpoint to the prawn. Hot and crisp, how could you go wrong? Even the beef teriyaki (\$11) offered a gentle surprise, with tender beef, just a hint of teriyaki and a sophisticated smattering of green bean.

Of the sushi, the Shuenn (\$15) is one of the restaurant's signature rolls, featuring yellowtail, avocado, spicy tuna and salmon tartare. As with every dish here, the quality of the seafood is immediately apparent. But equally remarkable are the empowering creative counterpoints; the sesame seed glaze on this roll, for example, that sparks each bite, just enough, bold without taking over.

Fluke Szechuan (\$14), a sashimi plate, reflects that same creativity, the thin translucent slices of fluke emboldened by an exotic collection of spices and mushrooms. This is a dish by a confident chef, and you appreciate his talents.

A homemade banana chocolate dessert sounded unique and enticing, but we chose instead a tempura cheesecake (\$8), and were rewarded by a delightfully delicate and warm dessert reminiscent of a French pastry. A green tea ice cream (\$2.50), though fine enough, was the least remarkable taste of the evening.

You won't be surprised to learn that the locals gushed when this restaurant reopened. It's a Jersey Shore gem.

by Teresa Politano