



Giant akagai measures at least 10cm across.



Teppanyaki chicken roll with asparagus.



Grilled deep sea conger eel with kabayaki sauce.

Fine, it's Japanese

The newest Kampachi restaurant feeds the senses with more than just food, writes **Tan Bee Hong**

WHEN Hotel Equatorial in Kuala Lumpur closed for renovations, I knew I would miss the Japanese restaurant. Kampachi had been one of my favourite places.

So when I heard that the management has reopened Kampachi in Troika, I hot-footed over to check it out.

Boy, was I surprised! Not only do I see familiar faces in restaurant manager Sylvia Chong and executive chef How Yoke Seng but the outlet design makes my jaw drop.

The design team has taken the meaning of a tall ceiling to new heights and even brought the night sky indoors with hanging clear

glass bulbs that seem to fall like a hundred stars when mirrored in the two-storey-tall glass windows.

A staircase at one side leads up to the very intimate teppanyaki room on the upper floor and the mural of a Japanese temple defines the walls along the stairs, enveloping diners in a surreal sense of tranquility.

FRESH, FRESH, FRESH

On a trench of ice at the sushi bar occupying one corner of the ground floor, are displayed the freshest seafood airflown in directly from Tokyo's Tsukiji Market every Tuesday and Friday.

My pulse quickens at the sight of the akagai or ark clam. No ordinary kerang, these are bigger than my fist and the cold chill of winter gives it a vibrant peachy blush. Not only that but the flesh is firm and crunchy with a subtle sweetness.

EIGHT IS ENOUGH

I would love to sit and watch the sushi chefs but How's omakase menu beckons. This eight-course menu is designed around the best seasonal items and the chef's whim. All customers have to do is relax and let the chef be at his most creative.

We start with zensai, a three-item appetiser comprising simmered burdock root, simmered seaweed roll and jellyfish marinated with vinegar and topped with a sprig of minty leaves. No excesses here, just a nibble to wickedly tease the palate.

Then, a clear dashi soup is ladled over grilled yellow tail and topped with mitsuba leaf, carrot and sliced citrus which adds a lovely flavour.

Our appetite well primed, we are almost impatient for tsukuri, another name for sashimi. Our platter has translucent slices of kanpachi (amber jack), peachy shake (salmon) and marbled toro (tuna belly). Wasabi and two choices of soya sauce (regular and 45 per cent less salt) are offered.

The toro is simply



Kampachi by Equatorial

Where
Lot G-3@The Troika
19 Persiaran KLCC,
Kuala Lumpur,
Tel: 03-2181 2282
Website: www.kampachi.com.my

Opening Hours
Mon to Sat: Noon-3pm, 6pm-11pm.
Sun: 11am-3pm, 6pm-11pm.

What's Cooking
Fine Japanese cuisine.

Must Try
Omakase menu, available till end February.

You'll Pay
RM300++ per person.

Atmosphere
Classy elegance.

The Loo
Clean with bidet facilities.

Service
Excellent.

Overall Verdict
Must try.

incredible. It practically melts in the mouth to yield a rich, yet delicate taste.

WELL COOKED

For yakimono, How has prepared ogon anago kabayaki. The square fillet of deep sea conger eel is lightly brushed with a sweet kabayaki sauce and grilled. Anago, though not as rich and oily as unagi, has silky soft flesh that's smooth in texture with a sweet taste.

Time for meat. Teppanyaki sounds simple enough but How doesn't do simple. Sliced beef is rolled around a stalk of asparagus and then pan fried with garlic butter. How remembers that I don't eat beef, so he substitutes beef with chicken fillet. Flat fish is another option.

The meat is served with a special blend of tosa shoyu (soya sauce) and mushroom broth harmonised with the earthy aroma of black truffle oil.

We move on to tempura. This is a single leg of Hokkaido snow crab but what a leg. Thick as my finger and even

longer, the sweet, juicy leg is shelled and coated with a batter so light it crumbles on contact with the teeth. Served with green tea salt and a deep fried green shishito pepper.

We're having so much fun I can't believe we're on the seventh course. This is rice with flaked grilled eel and shredded omelette with miso soup. So delicious I pick up every grain with my chopsticks.

MELON MAGIC

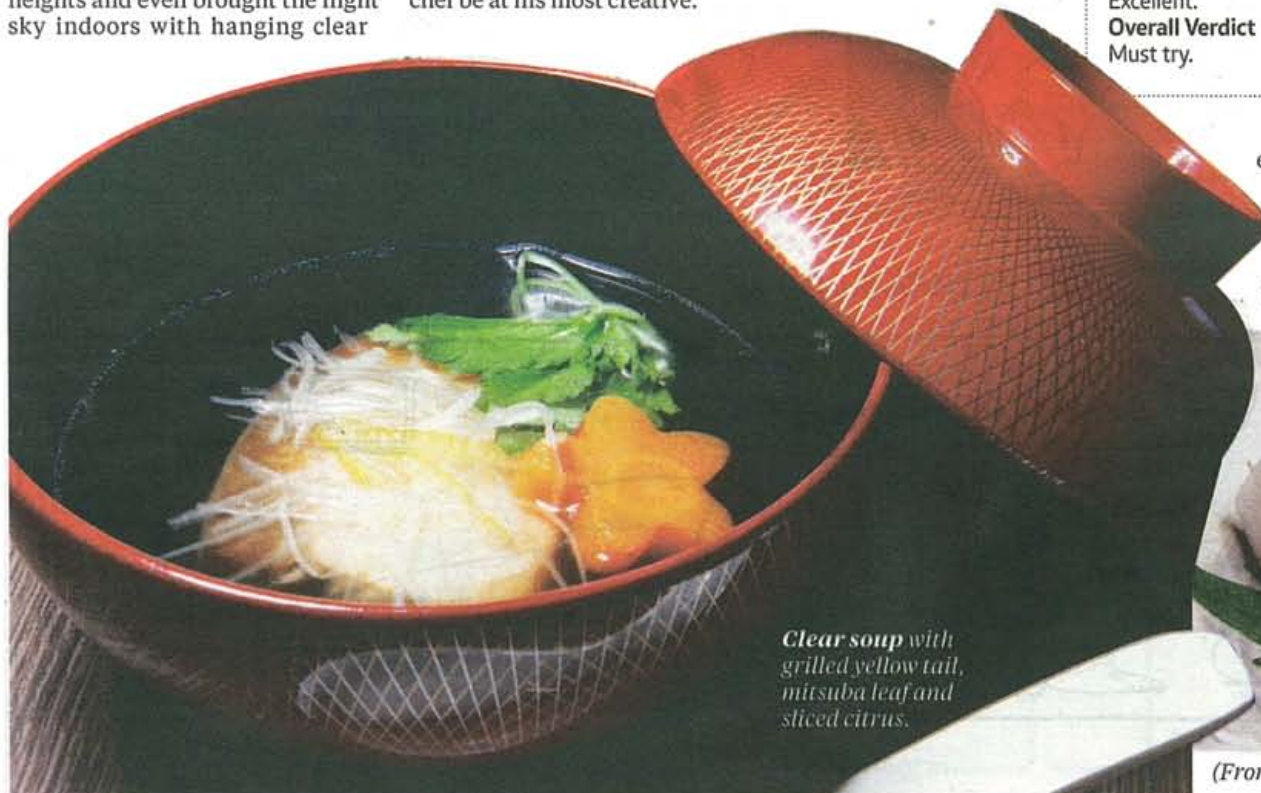
It seems that the Japanese are totally serious about their melons and a prized top-grade fruit, one that's perfectly round, can cost a few hundred ringgit.

For dessert, we are served a thick slice of melon with an equally perfect looking kinkan or kumquat. Just pop it into the mouth and bite to taste the smooth, fragrant rind and then the juice and sweet pulp.

☞ phoenixbee@nst.com.my



Prized Japanese melon on ice with kinkan kumquat.



Clear soup with grilled yellow tail, mitsuba leaf and sliced citrus.



(From left) amber jack, salmon and tuna belly.