

# ADVANTAGE

Live Unconventionally



EMBRAER MAGAZINE  
VOL 26 ➤ 2025

#### **Brazil's Water Stories**

An immersive exploration of Brazil's captivating water landscapes

#### **Cutting-Edge Connectivity**

Embraer introduces LEO satellite internet as aftermarket solution

#### **Remedy For A Cure**

Using AI to repurpose drugs and transform disease treatment





# OMAKASE BOOM

The rise of sushi counters across the U.S. has transformed this once-humble food into an exclusive fine dining experience that celebrates the artistry and tradition of sushi making

Sushi counters specializing in lengthy omakase menus—intimate and exclusive fine dining operations that don’t require too much space or specialized equipment—have exploded across the U.S. in recent years. Many of these counters have less than a dozen seats, and what separates the mere good from the great comes down to the quality of fish, knife skills and know-how of the sushi master preparing your meal.

Despite its luxurious modern trappings, sushi has a humble history, originally used as a method to preserve fish before refrigeration. Even the *nigiri* that we now know and love was developed a couple of centuries ago during Japan’s Edo period, beginning as a casual street food snack with slices of seafood hand-pressed with vinegared rice to form bite-sized *nigiri*. Back then, indulgent cuts like *otora* tuna belly and *wagyu* were unheard of, and chefs certainly weren’t topping *nigiri* with gold leaf and caviar.

It wasn’t until the 1970s that sushi restaurants boomed in Japan, with innovations like improved refrigeration technology and conveyor belt sushi taking off. Across the Pacific, the idea of eating raw fish still made many Americans squeamish, and it took pioneers like Denver’s Chef Toshi Kizaki to turn the tide. Kizaki remembers the early days of sushi in America well. He opened Sushi Den in Denver in 1984, and was one of the first chefs in the U.S. to import fresh fish directly from his native Japan, often flown in from the renowned Nagahama Fish Market in Kyushu, setting a new standard for sushi in America.

Chef Kizaki’s edomae-style sushi masterfully shifts from raw to steamed to dry-aged, delighting the palate with a dynamic journey of textures and flavors

WORDS Amber Gibson. IMAGE © Casey Wilson





Above: Dry-aged fish takes center stage at Friends Only, Chef Ray Lee’s innovative 10-seat omakase counter in San Francisco, CA

“Denver’s understanding of sushi was extremely limited in the 80s,” Kizaki said. Four decades later, he notes that diners are more curious and adventurous, seeking out unique experiences. Just a few blocks from Sushi Den, Kizaki recently opened an eponymous sushi *omakase* counter as a retirement project, introducing Denver to *edomae*-style *omakase* sushi at its highest form. Each evening, he happily and confidently greets guests, fingers dancing like a piano maestro across grains of rice, gently encouraging diners to eat each bite of sushi within five seconds for optimal texture and temperature.

Omakase Origins

*Omakase* simply translates to “I’ll leave it up to you,” and the tradition developed organically from regulars at sushi counters in Japan trusting the chef to craft their meal based on whatever fresh, seasonal ingredients were available.

“It wasn’t a fancy thing at the beginning,” said Eiji Nakamura, a Sushi Chef in Tokyo. “It grew naturally from the relationship between the chef and guest, knowing each guest’s palate and preferences.”

Only in the past decade has *omakase* become a familiar fine dining experience in the U.S.

Chef Phillip Frankland Lee was an early adopter when he opened his first 10-seat sushi bar in L.A. in 2017. Lee says he has been “obsessed” with sushi since he was five and began making sushi for friends and family when he was 13 with fish he purchased from the 99 Ranch Market.

“We used to have people come in and ask for *miso* soup and shrimp *tempura*,” Lee said. The concept of a restaurant only serving a chef’s choice progression of *nigiri* was not too common back then, but now Lee operates a dozen 10-seat Sushi by Scratch Restaurants in 11 cities nationwide with trusted sushi chefs at each. “It’s such a crazy swing to experience because I was sitting there behind the counter cooking my heart out almost a decade ago, with people telling me I was doing it wrong.”

Innovation Meets Tradition

Lee describes Sushi by Scratch Restaurants as an “*omakase*-inspired tasting menu” because he’s not typically personalizing menus for each guest but has instead created signature pieces of *nigiri* like *hamachi* brushed with sweet corn pudding and sprinkled with crunchy breadcrumbs from his wife Margarita Kallas-Lee’s famous sourdough bread. Or *unagi* freshwater eel seasoned with *matcha* and dramatically torched

in front of guests with a luge of bone marrow fat. These innovative flavor combinations become indelible taste memories for diners, who keep coming back for more.

“In some ways, I would argue that what I’m doing is incredibly traditional and linked to *edomae*,” Lee said. “I incorporate the flavor profiles of smoking, roasting, fermenting, curing, pickling—all of the traditional techniques they would use to make sushi. And I use saucework as they did, but instead of trying to mask the fishiness, it’s used to elevate the fish.” At the same time, Lee is inspired by the flavor profiles he is familiar with as an American growing up in L.A.

Every great sushi chef adds a unique personal touch. At Kizaki, diners enjoy a 20-course menu featuring 13 courses of *nigiri*, including raw, cured, seared, and dry-aged preparations. “We use different techniques to prepare each fish to give guests a dynamic progression of textures and flavors,” Kizaki said. Although his style of sushi isn’t quite as showy as Lee’s, Kizaki pays just as much attention to his rice as his fish, sourcing rice from Japan’s Niigata Prefecture and seasoning it with a house blend of soy, mirin and sake. “Our *shari* [rice] is elevated with a variety of vinegars to create layers of flavor, slight color variations and different textures to maximize the natural flavors of the fish.” For example, with bluefin tuna he transitions to a rare red vinegar from Kyoto to match the fish’s richer texture. And Kizaki isn’t afraid to add the occasional unexpected flourish, like a dollop of blue cheese atop *magurozuke* soy marinated tuna to emphasize its savory *umami* flavor.



“It wasn’t a fancy thing at the beginning. It grew naturally from the relationship between the chef and guest, knowing each guest’s palate and preferences.”



Above: At Sushi by Scratch Restaurants, each piece of sushi is a work of art, crafted with precision and the freshest ingredients

Left: As Co-founder of Sushi by Scratch Restaurants, Chef Phillip Frankland Lee is celebrated for his innovative take on sushi and Japanese cuisine

IMAGES left page © Annette Chu, right page from top © Suzi Pratt, © Teal Thomsen



Dry-aged fish is the focus at Friends Only, Chef Ray Lee’s experimental 10-seat *omakase* counter in San Francisco that doubles as a research and development kitchen for sister restaurant Akikos. Diners can see whole fish hanging in the dry ager, and the process both concentrates flavor and tenderizes the meat as enzymes break down and moisture evaporates. Bluefin tuna belly aged for four weeks simply melts in your mouth like butter, while *unagi* freshwater eel is aged for a week, so the skin gets super crispy when grilled over binchotan charcoal. “The temperature in our dry ager is set to nearly freezing levels, with high humidity and slow airflow,” Lee said. “This replicates a sea-like environment for our aging process. My goal is to serve well-rested seafood at its peak quality, as fresh doesn’t always taste best.”

A Deeper Appreciation

Nakamura currently runs an eight-seat sushi counter at Andaz Tokyo Toranomon Hills, working alongside one other sushi chef, with each chef responsible for four guests. The Sushi receives a mix of local Japanese and Western guests, and Nakamura said he observes a noticeable difference in the level of sushi understanding between the two groups.

“Many Western diners often lack familiarity with authentic sushi,” he said. “However, I have also seen a significant improvement in recent years, with more Western guests developing a deeper appreciation and knowledge of traditional sushi.” This includes being open to trying more esoteric ingredients like *hotaru-ika* firefly squid and *akagai* ark shell clam, along with familiar favorites like *ototoro* fatty tuna, salmon and scallops.

In Denver, Kizaki has been instrumental in educating diners about sushi over the years, and continues to share his knowledge, showing off a whole tuna collar early in the meal so diners understand the cut of fish they are about to enjoy. The menu lists both Japanese and English names for each fish, along with where its from, while the intimate, interactive nature of the *omakase* counter provides an opportunity for diners to ask questions and learn.

“The most challenging aspect of being a sushi chef is ensuring that every guest leaves completely satisfied,” Nakamura said. “Unlike many other chefs who work behind the scenes, sushi chefs perform in front of their guests. We are responsible not only for preparing the food but also for engaging and entertaining guests throughout their dining experience.” Nakamura notes that mastering the technical skills of sushi-making takes decades of practice, but the ability to communicate, listen and connect with guests is equally important. “Balancing both elements is what makes this profession truly demanding.” ◀



◀  
EMBRAER TIP

Fly to Tokyo aboard the **Praetor 600**, the world’s most technologically advanced super-midsize jet—engineered for long-range precision and unmatched inflight comfort. With full fly-by-wire technology and best-in-class cabin pressurization, you’ll arrive ready to immerse yourself in *omakase* artistry.



Left: At Andaz Tokyo Toranomon Hills, the Sushi showcases traditional Japanese craftsmanship with a modern twist, offering an authentic yet innovative culinary experience

Above: The Sushi features a dedicated sushi bar where skilled chefs craft each piece with meticulous attention to detail, using the freshest seasonal ingredients

Right: At Kizaki, Chef Toshi Kizaki reconnects with his roots, serving authentic Tokyo-style edomae sushi with 200-year-old techniques that honor each ingredient’s integrity

