

Kumi opens at Mandalay Bay



(Photo: The Light Group)

SHARE



Kumi Japanese Restaurant + Bar is the latest addition to the restaurant collection of The Light Group at [Mandalay Bay](#), and another notch on the belt for talented executive chef Akira Back. Back, who also helms posh Japanese eatery Yellowtail at Bellagio, was a professional snowboarder in his

previous life before learning the craft of Asian fare under pioneers such as Nobu Matsuhisa and Masaharu Morimoto.

Kumi is Back's latest baby, and he's created a menu that offers a glimpse of his Korean-American heritage. Chef Back took some time to explain what that means for guests who are looking for something interesting, yet familiar to eat, and exactly how you should navigate the menu dish by dish.

What is the mission behind Kumi?

Our mission behind Kumi was to expand our horizons and bring in some new influences, especially from my Korean background. With the success of Yellowtail in the Bellagio the past 5 years, I wanted to take that success and expand on it. Seeing the Wow factor on peoples' faces and the excitement when they come to eat in one of my restaurants is the ultimate goal. Like all chefs, my passion for food is passed onto the guests through my dishes. At the end of the day we just want everyone to be happy.

What was the thought process behind creating the menu at Kumi?

With Yellowtail's menu we kept to mostly the traditional style of Japanese cuisine with a few twists here and there. Our tuna pizza is a perfect example of that. The tuna pizza's main flavor comes from the tuna itself, enhanced with sea salt, truffle oil, and ponzu aioli. Japanese cuisine is very simple in the fact that the few items speak for themselves, but because they are so simple they have to be perfect.

With Kumi we branched out even further. Our main goal with Kumi's menu was to hit a broader market and make the food fun and inventive while being approachable, to take what we know best and make it more familiar to everyone. We wanted anyone to be able to come to Kumi and find something they would love to eat.

What was the inspiration for the signature rolls?

Some of my inspiration comes from my Korean-American heritage. You'll get a glimpse of that with some of the signature rolls such as the Seoul Garden which features baby spinach, carrots and grilled shiitake which is similar to the bibimbap (rice topped with sautéed vegetables) my mom used to make for me when I was growing up, and the Fireball with crab, cucumber and XXX Hot Kimchee sauce. My other inspiration has been the diversity of Las Vegas. There are so many different restaurants in this city that offer amazing food, I really wanted to think outside the box with this menu.

Are there any dishes you created specifically for this menu?

While all of the dishes are new creations specifically designed for Kumi, the items I think will be menu standouts are the crispy rice with seaweed and Screaming O sauce and the Bone-in pork chop with apple fennel slaw and an apple miso glaze. This dish is so flavorful and has already become a favorite for customers.

What would you consider the ideal journey through the menu? if you could dictate it, what flavors and tastes should guests hit and in what order?

I think guests might want to start with some of our cool shared plates such as the crispy rice with blackened tuna, seaweed and screaming O sauce followed by the Kobe tataki with micro arugula, garlic crisps, ponzu and olive oil. The miso black cod is also a must-do followed by Colorado lamb chops which are served with edamame couscous and a really flavorful Korean anticucho sauce. I would say to continue the journey with the 007 Octopussy Roll which has crab salad, spicy octopus and crispy potatoes. The flavors at Kumi are all so different and the spices really take the palate to different places throughout the meal.

Where can we see your specific touches on the menu? Dishes or notes that are your signature technique or ingredients or style?

You'll definitely be able to see my culinary style in the signature rolls. I like to get creative. You'll see that with the Pop Rockin' roll that features spicy tuna, crab, salmon, avocado and pop rocks. I know it sounds unusual but it's a favorite.