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First taste of Raw Fish Inspires Lifework Inspired by Japanese sushi master's skills



Usman Khan (30, Pakistani)

"I used to think that making sushi was just cutting up raw fish," admits Usman Khan. "Until I saw how Japanese sushi chefs worked, that is." Khan is a sushi chef at Nobu Cape Town, a creative Japanese restaurant in the South African capital.

Khan started to work at sushi restaurant run by a local owner from 2005. Initially, Khan had not made a clear decision about becoming a professional cook, but he was intrigued by sushi—after all, he had only ever eaten fish cooked. The raw fish and the surprisingly simple-yet-tasty flavorings of sushi soon had Khan hooked, and he determined that he would make his way in the world as a cook.

Khan's first exposure to the true delights of sushi came in 2011 when he worked under Hatsushiro Muraoka at Takumi, another sushi restaurant in Cape Town. According to Khan, it was Muraoka, a true sushi craftsman, who taught him what sushi really was. "The way you slice the fish influences the taste of the sushi and the experience itself," he explains. "There were intricate rules about how we approached the art of making sushi, but each of them was backed with a rational reason. It was there that my eyes were opened to the expansive world of sushi. Although Muraoka was approaching seventy years of age, his every thought and word was about cooking and his enthusiasm never seemed to slow down. "His dedication to his work was impressive," says Khan, who spent two years at Takumi before moving on to Nobu Cape Town with an eye to expanding the breadth of his work.

Khan's entry in the Washoku World Challenge is "Sweet miso and jalapeno seared Salmon sashimi." The salmon is soaked in a marinade of miso, *dashi* broth, and *ponzu* vinegar, and then seared. The finishing touch is a dash of sauce that contains jalapeno for good measure. "The idea for this dish came from the black cod in sweet miso we serve at Nobu," says Khan. "I decided to use salmon when I was pleasantly taken aback by the flavors of salmon soaked in soy sauce served at a Japanese cuisine workshop. Searing the salmon lends depth to the dish because it adds the flavor of cooked fish without losing the freshness of raw fish. He says he used jalapeno "to offer a wide range of flavor that combines *umami*, tartness, and spice in one dish." Simple but complex is just what Khan was aiming for.

Khan, says "the enchantment of being a chef is that you constantly get to use your imagination as part of your job." He aspired to open his own restaurant where washoku is not known much and promote washoku and its fascination in the future.



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