



From Finance Professional to Chef

Creating a Dish Highlighting the Diverse Flavors of Miso

Bryan S. Emperor (U.S.A.)

Bryan S. Emperor first visited Japan in the early 1990s as a university student, under an exchange program with J.F. Oberlin University in Tokyo. “Back then, most students chose to study abroad in Europe. That’s why I picked Japan, because not many people knew about Japan yet,” says Emperor.

After graduating from university with a degree in economics, Emperor worked at the US financial services firm Lehman Brothers, where he was assigned to work with Japanese clients. This would have a big impact on his life, as he often visited Japan for work and had the opportunity to eat at high-end ryotei restaurants, awakening his interest in washoku. “I was just amazed at the foods that I didn’t have an opportunity to eat as a student, how it incorporated the seasons,” says Emperor.

The passion for food continued to burn inside, and after working for some eight years in the financial sector, Emperor decided to enroll at the famous Culinary Institute of America. Students of the school must gain experience working at actual restaurants in order to graduate, and he chose to gain apprenticeship at a Japanese restaurant, which was a first for the school. Since no one had done it before, Emperor struggled to find a restaurant that would accept him. Although he apprenticed at restaurants that served yakiniku and kamameshi, Emperor says, “Working at an actual Japanese restaurant enabled me to learn many things about washoku, which I could only otherwise learn about through television and books.”

After graduating from the Culinary Institute of America, Emperor gained further experience at various restaurants including creative washoku restaurant Nobu in New York, and as a chef at a Japanese restaurant in Beijing, China, polishing his skills both in the U.S. and abroad. In 2008, Emperor entered the Sushi Awards 2008 for original sushi creations, placing third at the competition in London. Around this time, he gained an opportunity to apprentice for approximately two months at the renowned Kikunoi ryotei in Kyoto. “On top of the food at Kikunoi, I learned from owner and chef Yoshihiro Murata about his attitude toward food, and was able to talk with professionals about the ingredients used at the restaurant such as fish and katsuobushi. It was only a short apprenticeship, but I gained a lot from the experience.” It was also Emperor’s first opportunity to work in Kyoto and emphasized just how much dishes and ingredients can differ by region.

Emperor’s entry for the World Washoku Challenge 2016 is a preparation of King salmon ishiyaki with winter vegetables and miso butter. The dish features King salmon pan-seared until the skin is crispy, colorfully garnished with lotus root and other winter vegetables. “When I first visited Japan, I can still remember being amazed at the numerous varieties of miso that were lined up at a miso shop.” Emperor’s dish is garnished with a sauce made from four different types of miso, each differing in taste, color, and texture, and mixed with a small amount of butter to achieve the perfect harmony with the seared King salmon. The fat from the butter adds richness and leaves the taste of miso lingering on the tongue.

Emperor is currently involved in a number of new restaurant projects as a consulting chef, but his dream is to open his own restaurant one day. He envisions a restaurant that reflects the full breadth of his life experience, whose food is based on washoku but also incorporates influences from his experience working in China.



King Salmon Ishiyaki with Winter Vegetables and Miso Butter