



Exposed to Japanese Country Cooking from Working at a Ryokan in Yamagata A Fresh Twist on the Japanese Favorite Kinpira

Shaun Presland (Australia)

Shaun Presland's interest in cooking started at an early age, helping his mother bake cakes as a child. While his heart was set on becoming a chef, Presland enrolled in university at the urging of his parents. Still, he majored in hospitality to assist his culinary aspirations. As a university student, Presland took a job cooking for the military and acquired a food preparation license. Although he says he was incredibly busy at the time, he was steadily working toward becoming a chef.



After graduating from university in 1993, Presland visited Japan. At the time, there was a major Japan boom in Australia, and he thought that if he could pick up some Japanese, it would help him find a good job in his home country.

He proceeded to get a kitchen job at a ryokan in Ginzan Onsen in Yamagata Prefecture, where he gained experience in washoku. "When I arrived in Japan, I knew nothing about washoku," admits Presland, who came to embrace Japanese food and culture through being exposed to typical washoku dishes such as tempura and sunomono, as well as Japanese country cooking such as sansai ryori.

"After working at the ryokan for a year, I was put in charge of preparing the sashimi courses, which made me very happy." Presland was particularly influenced by a sophisticated sushi chef who also worked at the ryokan. The sushi chef had his own restaurant and one day invited Presland to come for a meal. As Presland sat at the counter, the chef prepared sushi in front of him. "I could not believe how delicious it tasted, using raw fish and rice." It was then that Presland made up his mind to become a sushi chef.

Once back in Australia, Presland worked as a sushi chef for seven years. At the Japanese restaurant Unkai in Sydney, which was part of a Japanese-owned hotel, Presland learned about both the philosophy and techniques of washoku under the Japanese head chef. He was then given the opportunity to be involved in the newly opening Nobu Bahamas restaurant, which would be another turning point in Presland's career. The exposure to Nobu's unique and artistic take on washoku would expand his range as a chef.

Presland's entry for the World Washoku Challenge 2016 is a preparation of kinpira chicken with balsamic teriyaki. The kinpira is wrapped in chicken thigh fillet and paired with a teriyaki sauce incorporating the deep flavor of balsamic vinegar, and garnished with a crispy chicken skin. "I first ate kinpira in Yamagata, when I came to Japan for the first time to work. I love the texture of kinpira," says Presland. By purpose, the dish seems Western on the outside yet holds a surprise with Japanese kinpira inside.

After serving as executive chef of modern washoku restaurant Saké, which has locations in Sydney and Melbourne, Presland is currently preparing for a new Japanese restaurant to open in Melbourne in March 2017. As the chef, Presland is excited at the prospects for the new restaurant, which will feature a different concept on each floor including omakase sushi and high-end kaiseki.



Kinpira Chicken with Balsamic Teriyaki