

CHEF CONVERSATIONS

In the kitchen with Ken Tanaka of Shinbay

BY ALISON BAILIN BATZ / PHOTO BY DEBBY WOLVOS



Ken Tanaka is a master chef and culinary leader at Shinbay, a traditional omakase room focused on authentic Japanese ingredients, preparation and precision.

What is a “master chef?”

A master chef in Japan is called an “itamae” or “shokunin” and denotes a master artisan dedicated to a lifelong pursuit of perfection. It means possessing elite knife skills, profound ingredient knowledge and a deep ethical devotion to the craft. To give perspective, it is akin to a James Beard Award-winning chef or a Master Chef certified by the American Culinary Federation in the United States.

What sets Shinbay apart?

Many wonderful Asian fine dining locales offer an omakase-style chef’s tasting menu in addition to their a la carte selections. At Shinbay, our small tasting room – featuring just one intimate sushi bar – solely focuses on omakase. Japanese for “to entrust the chef,” we offer two seatings nightly with a set menu based on seasonal selections and sourcing unique to our restaurant.

How is your sourcing unique?

We have a personal relationship with fish markets across Tokyo, Osaka and Nagasaki. Each day, we talk to our partners at those markets to seek out the best of the best catches of the day. It is on my menu and on plates less than 72 hours later.

What fish are you especially proud to showcase at Shinbay?

During the fall months, it can vary greatly, but guests will certainly see several types of seasonal tuna as well as Aji, which is also known as horse mackerel, and Unagi, best-known here at eel. A personal favorite dish unique to Shinbay is the kegani, or horsehair crab, which is a prized delicacy primarily harvested off the coast of Hokkaido.

Does Shinbay strictly focus on fish for its menus?

While the pride of the menu, we also utilize ingredients such as A5 Wagyu in fun and surprising ways as well as a host of Asian vegetables, which run the gamut from Japanese eggplant and mustard greens to Daikon radish, bamboo shoots, and lotus root.

Shinbay, 3720 N. Scottsdale Road, Scottsdale; 480.361.1021; www.shin-bay.com.