

## Raising the Bar on Asian Cuisine

Here I am in the mood to eat out, but my reluctant husband lies recumbent on the couch. Luckily, I know four magic words that instantly galvanize him: “Let’s go for sushi.”

Yes, we do love sushi.

I’ve visited many good area sushi restaurants, but many are somewhat lacking in atmosphere. That’s why I was delighted by the Zen-like feel of Toro Sushi Bar. Against a backdrop of Japanese purple walls, tightly pleated cream curtains frame a lovely space, enhanced by subdued lighting and gently flickering candles.

Yet as inviting as it is, a beautiful interior is only part of the equation when it comes to a memorable dining experience. Toro Sushi Bar rounds out the rest of the equation with outstanding cuisine and cheerful, professional service.

Owned by Amy Chen and her husband, sushi chef Andy Hayasaka, Toro Sushi Bar goes far beyond the usual Japanese fare of sushi, sashimi, and ordinary rolls into another, exciting dimension of Asian cuisine.

We began our evening slowly with two appetizers from the sushi bar. Fried spicy chopped salmon wrapped in nori gave the tasty \$7 Crispy Salmon Roll a nice jolt of flavor. Sashimi Jalapeño, \$12, thinly sliced slivers of tuna, salmon, and yellowtail, each discretely topped by a thin slice of garlic and jalapeño pepper, at first seemed simple enough, but the first bite convinced us that the sweetness of the fish against the bite of the pepper was an inspired combination.

Specialty rolls, a good indicator of a sushi chef’s creativity, were outstanding, especially the \$13 Sade,

crunchy spicy tuna and cucumber wrapped in mango with a sauce of silky mango lending a tropical feel. Again incorporating spicy tuna crunch, the \$6 Mexican Roll was paired this time with avocado and rolled in masago (tiny fish eggs).

The menu offers plenty of selections for non-sushi eaters, including the \$7 Rock Shrimp, a sweet and spicy selection of these satisfyingly tender little shrimp, as well as such entrées from the kitchen as tempuras and teriyakis.

Properly primed, we eagerly awaited what would prove to be an evening highlight: the \$15 Aji, a dark Japanese fish, similar to mackerel, dramatically presented in authentic Japanese style, the head and skeleton in a back bend, with the filleted meat rearranged on the side. Once we finished, the Aji was whisked away and the skeleton and head deep-fried, then returned to us, soft bones and all. Five stars for the Aji!

Having proved ourselves adventurous, we were ready to follow Amy Chen’s recommendation of the Tuna Dumpling. At a modest \$8, it’s an onion-shaped winner! Its layers peel open to reveal a center generously filled with fresh blue crab meat, complemented with crunchy avocado and creamy wasabi—definitely recom-

mended.

For a light finish, we chose both the Mochi Ice Cream, \$3, small golf-ball-sized ice cream nuggets wrapped with sticky rice, and a first-rate banana tempura, \$4.

And then it was not “Sayonara,” but “See you soon” to Amy and Andy and the wonderful Toro Sushi Bar. ▲

### Toro Sushi Bar

44 Upper Montclair Plaza  
Upper Montclair  
973-746-8555  
ToroSushiBar.com

Hours of operation:  
Lunch: Tue-Sat 11:30am–2:30pm  
Dinner: Tue-Sat 5-10pm, Sun 4-9pm  
BYO

Toro Sushi Bar favorites, clockwise from left: Rock Shrimp, Tuna Wrapped Roll, Central Park Roll, and Red Naruto