

# hong kong grapevine

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EVERY year around this time, Hong Kongers wait in eager anticipation for the first typhoon of the year which, if it gets beyond a T8, means that everyone can leave work early and hole up at home with a plentiful supply of wine and snacks. There's certainly something evocative about watching rain lash the palm trees and lightning-struck mountains flare up from the comfortable vantage point of your sofa.

It can also be said that Hong Kong's dining trends also mimic the city's erratic weather patterns as just like a sudden T8 warning in the middle of the working week, a wave of a particular cuisine sporadically washes over the city, creating relentless queues in the rain and people rushing from work to claim the last table. Of late, it appears to be Japanese-South American culinary ventures charming Hong Kong's diners - **ToykoLima**, **El Mercado** (Japanese-Peruvian) and **Djapa** (Japanese-Brazilian) have recently opened with their zesty smorgasbord of fresh fish, lime and corn. Brazil and Peru claim the highest Japanese population

in South America and so Japanese influences have run deep in Peruvian dishes since the late 19th century. The latest line-up to the ceviche and sushi merry-go-round is **Uma Nota**, following in the footsteps of Djapa with a lively blend of Brazilian art and a focus on Brazilian-Japanese street food. Owner **Alexis Offe** brings his love of Sao Paulo's Liberdade district and marries traditional Brazilian dishes with a Japanese twist such as prawn and calamari ceviche with aji amarillo (hot yellow peppers) and coriander, Brazilian dumplings with chicken and okra and everyone's favourite, Brazilian empanadas with spicy salsa.

Uma Nota, 38 Peel St, Central; phone +852 2889 7576.

Continuing the Japanese theme, **Sushi Masataka** has sprung up on the site that formerly housed Sushi Rozan of Lai Sun Dining group fame. Named after its chef **Masataka Fujisawa** Sushi Masataka is all about omakase - seating a mere eight guests in its relatively palatial space. Masataka-san sources fresh produce



from Tokyo's Tsukiji fish market and his signature dishes include sliced tuna sushi (Japan's much lauded fatty tuna) and steamed abalone with liver sauce. This being an omakase restaurant, though, you'll never be sure what you'll be getting until the dishes come out. Sushi Masataka, Shop 2, G/F, The Oakhill, 18 Wood Rd, Wan Chai; phone +852 2574 1333.

Moving away from the Japanese corner of the world, but still firmly sticking in the region, **Soho Spice** is set to become another Hong Kong Asian dining favourite. A 14-year stalwart on buzzing Elgin St, Soho Spice has revamped its menu which is inspired by southeast Asian street food from Malaysia, Vietnam and Thailand. Chef **Peter Cuong Franklin** has come back from his travels armed with new recipes hailing from roadside stalls, from bao to satay skewers and tempura. The extensive menu also flirts with curries, noodles and grilled fish, which match the laid-back vibe and hearty cocktail list. Soho Spice, 47B Elgin St, Central; phone +852 2526 2227. 🍷

*Top:* Food from Soho Spice.

*Middle:* Food from Uma Nota Restaurant.

*Bottom:* Sushi Masataka restaurant.

