

NOSH NEWS



Lobster Napoleon with Meyer lemon cream, ginger caviar, corn tuile and potato brunoise from Jacky's on Prairie.

ROMAN EMPIRE Former Boka, Landmark and Topaz Café chef Giuseppe Scurato extends his reign with new Uptown restaurant **Ceres' Table**, a name that pays homage to the Roman goddess of agriculture and harvest. Seasonal fare from the Sicilian-born Scurato includes gnocchi with Gunthorp rabbit confit and grilled octopus salad with a puttanesca sauce. 4882 N. Clark St., 773.878.4882, cerestable.com.

WHAT HAPPENS IN VEGAS... Sin City adds another star-studded restaurant to its repertoire this month courtesy of Chicagoan Shawn McClain (Spring, Green Zebra). Part of CityCenter, a 67-acre, \$8.5-billion project, **Sage** brings Mediterranean-influenced food and a progressive beverage list to the ARIA Resort & Casino. 3730 Las Vegas Blvd., Las Vegas, 877.230.2742, arialasvegas.com.

PRESSING THEIR LUCK Pastoral—the European-style shop in the Loop that offers a vast selection of artisanal cheeses, fresh-baked breads, cured meats, pâtes and creative condiments—has added new selections to its panini menu. Try a Caprese with mozzarella, podda cheese (similar to Parmigiano) and oven-roasted tomatoes. 53 E. Lake St., 312.658.1250, pastoralartisan.com.

FRENCH CONNECTION Jacky's Bistro reincarnation **Jacky's on Prairie** links the charm of Evanston to the flavors of France with a menu of globally inspired cuisine rooted in classical French traditions. Former Jacky's fans will say *oui* to the new foie gras oxtail terrine, lobster bisque, braised short ribs and bouillabaisse. 2545 Prairie Ave., Evanston, 847.733.0899, jackysonprairie.com. —L.S.

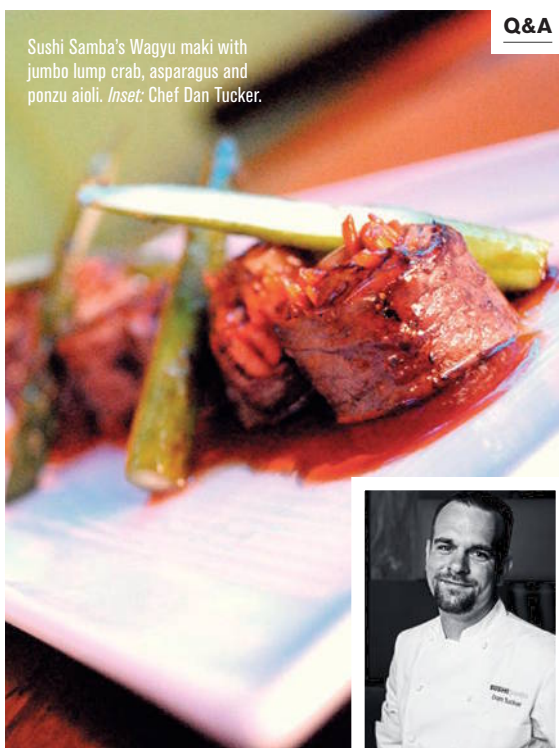
MINI REVIEW

Steak Out?

Like Oprah or Madonna, sleek Dana Hotel restaurant Ajasteak has dropped its last name—and its \$18 an ounce Kobe beef—to go simply by **Aja** (pronounced “Asia”). Will shedding the steakhouse identity shape Aja into this winter's go-to dinner spot? From a recent meal there, we say yes. Chef Joshua Linton's new menu would, we imagine, satisfy Ms. Winfrey herself, with hefty plates of historically inspired, modernly executed Asian cuisine. Tender five-spice short ribs, perfectly accented by charred onion, need no knife. The rock shrimp, a holdover from Ajasteak, are as crispy as ever, and tangy house-made XO sauce elevates a side of tofu to a dish even skeptics will love. But it's the move to more casual dining—everything is shared (warning: these portions are huge), and sushi is marketed as a bar snack—that's just what Aja needs to be recognized for what Ajasteak has always had: artful, inspired food. 660 N. State St., 312.202.6050, ajachicago.com. —M.C.



Aja's five-spice short ribs.



Sushi Samba's Wagyu maki with jumbo lump crab, asparagus and ponzu aioli. Inset: Chef Dan Tucker.

Q&A

Sushi Confidential

For a vet of Alinea and Room 21, Sushi Samba Rio's new chef de cuisine, Dan Tucker, has kept a surprisingly quiet profile. No longer! His omakase pre-fixe dinners and cider-brined pork chop have Chicago diners buzzing. —Michael Nigrant

How did you get into cooking? I went to Illinois Wesleyan, but was pretty unhappy. They eventually asked me to leave. Evidently you're supposed to go to class when you're in college. So I got this job at a place that was a copy of Outback Steakhouse. I worked the deep fry station making bloomin' onions and chicken tenders. I was completely lost and terrified, but I got hooked on the adrenaline of a kitchen.

So how did you find your way to Alinea? I worked there as an extern while at Kendall College. Getting my butt kicked day in and day out there, I grew tremendously. I now understand how perfection and small details make a restaurant successful.

Derek Jeter was in this summer. Do you get nervous cooking for celebs? It feels really nice when you see three Yankees sitting at your table. It doesn't make me nervous, especially after working at Alinea, where we cooked for Ruth Reichl's evaluation for *Gourmet*. One night, though, I hear “Charlie Trotter is on table 41 and wants all the specials.” I remember my stomach hitting the floor.

What's the Dan Tucker experience like at Sushi Samba? It's a disservice if you don't order off the hot menu. We're being playful and interactive, serving Wagyu guests can cook tableside on hot Japanese rocks. 504 N. Wells St., 312.595.2300, sushisamba.com. ■