

eat & drink

MINI-REVIEW
Lure
Izakaya Pub
 2925 N. Halsted St.
 773-360-8816
 ★★☆☆☆
 Take it or leave it



Karaage



Whole red snapper

Raw talent

LAKEVIEW'S LURE IZAKAYA PUB OFFERS TASTY SMALL PLATES WITH A MODERN FEEL

By Michael Nagrant | FOR REDEYE

Death and food are inextricably linked. Sure, food sustains you, but if you eat too much of the wrong thing—I'm looking at you, Halloween-themed Burger King Whopper—it could kill you. The basis for any good wake is usually an incredible dinner spread. Heck, the Mormons have a special dish for the occasion called funeral potatoes. Some even contemplate what their final death-row meal would be. Last-meal desires have a wide range. But they're usually characterized in two ways: nostalgic desires for Mom's meatloaf and ziti or a tendency for luxurious things such as wine, truffles and foie gras.

I too have played this game, yearning for things like Detroit-based Buddy's Pizza, fresh king crab and Gus's World Famous Fried Chicken in Memphis, Tenn. But after a recent visit to Lakeview's Lure Izakaya Pub, a new Japanese restaurant from brothers Kee (Mirai Sushi, Strings Ramen) and Macku (Macku Sushi, the defunct Kaze) Chan, I have reconsidered my plans.

The food: I'm not saying Lure Izakaya Pub is the best Japanese restaurant in Chicago. It's

not even the best izakaya (casual drinking establishments that serve an assortment of salty snacks, sort of like the Japanese version of a Spanish tapas bar). I prefer Izakaya Mita in Bucktown for brazenly serving ika shiokara, aka tasty fermented squid guts, and their curated sake list. But the food at Lure Izakaya is well-executed and representative of what I really might crave for a last meal. Sure, pizza and fried chicken are great, but they're often characterized by one single rich note of flavor. Sometimes, that's what you

want. But the things I find most satisfying are often dishes with balance—a ton of acidity and strong, contrasting flavors. The food at Lure Izakaya has that in spades.

And as a bonus, Lure just happens to have killer fried chicken (\$7, listed as "karaage" in Japanese on the menu), featuring crackling, mahogany-colored hunks of poultry served on a mound of sweet, soy-glazed rice.

If you prefer fish over chicken, there's also a deeply immersive fish stick-like experience. Whole red snapper (\$18) is filleted, cut into rectangles, tossed in tempura batter and fried. The airy, crusted sticks are stacked inside the also-fried bony carcass of the filleted fish. It goes without saying; this dish is definitely not for vegans. The snapper's dark, dead eyes stared back at me while I ate, but I didn't mind. Instead of providing a heavy mayo-based tartar sauce, Lure's kitchen served up an addictive vinegar and orange citrus-infused ponzu dip. After I ran out of fish for dipping, I considered doing a shot of the remaining juice.

Craving more of the ponzu's bright flavors,

I turned to zuke salmon (\$7), featuring pristine pink planks of raw fish lightly marinated in mouth-puckering rice vinegar and salty soy sauce that had me licking my chops and digging in for more.

Also remarkable in its raw state was the blue shrimp (\$3 each) soaked in spicy lemon-lime yuzu chili broth. I expected the texture to be rubbery and challenging, but it was creamy and satisfying, like an impeccable oyster. A dish of oshinko moriwase (\$5)—mixed pickles featuring beets, radish, eggplant, cucumbers and gobo root preserved in rice vinegar, soy and fish sauce—made an excellent mid-meal palate cleanser.

Not everything here was light and bright. A plate of seared foie gras (\$15), served over wafer-thin slices of earthy king mushrooms and showered with tiny ribbons of chive and a splash of sweet soy glaze, was rewarding in its richness. The salty, sweet, syrupy dish was a superior alternative to the usual jam-slathered brioche presentations found everywhere else.

On the night I visited Lure, the winds



Udon

RATINGS KEY **** DEAD UPON ARRIVAL **** PROCEED WITH CAUTION **** GIVE IT SOME TIME
 **** TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT **** OFF TO A GOOD START **** HEATING UP **** ALREADY HOT



Zuke salmon

howled and fall was finally making an appearance here in Chicago. A slurp-worthy bowl of fiery togarashi-spiked kakejiru (a broth made with bonito, kelp, soy sauce and rice wine) filled with tender udon noodles (\$7) was a nice restorative, an effective bulwark against the impending cold.

The only thing I didn't like much was a grilled black cod cheek (\$9) slathered with sweet miso. While the miso was buttery and had a bright sake finish, the fish wafted an off-putting ammonia smell.

The scene: Though the food was great, the dining room looked like a morgue. This might be because I visited on a Monday night when there were only three parties in the room. The design was stark, featuring shiny beige-colored banquettes, dark espresso wood trim and pendant lanterns that looked like the wiry tops of vintage birdcages. While the design was sleek, sharp and loungey, there was also industrial white fiberboard ceiling tile that was incongruous with the rest of the room. It looked like the kind of stuff you might find in an abandoned banquet hall yellowed with age from decades of cigarette smoke infiltration. The room needed flowers or more art, some kind of life. Not helping matters was a soundtrack of atonal synth-music and screeching violins that reminded me of the kind of stuff you might hear while playing Nintendo. I might've dug the music were

I chilling at home, but at the restaurant, it reinforced the cold vibe. Also, it might seem trivial, but Lure used paper napkins rather than cloth, which felt cheap and inelegant.

Service: Great restaurants tend to be boisterous and spirited. The two servers I interacted with were accommodating but not particularly warm. Their style felt less like hospitality and more like cold deferent customer service.

Drinks: Our server also doubled as our bartender. I overheard her asking someone what garnishes she should use while making our drinks, which wasn't promising. One cocktail, the Fever Tea (\$12), promised an exotic assortment of lemongrass-infused gin, orange bitters and sparkling wine, but it was mostly flat and soapy-tasting. Another drink, the Agave Roundhouse (\$12), made with tequila, cilantro, lime and soda, was garnished with shishito pepper and jalapeno that kicked me in the teeth with a hellfire of chili heat that usurped all other flavors in the glass.

Bottom line: Lure makes incredible Japanese food steeped with assertive, sweet and brightly acidic flavors. The cold Zen-like room could use a little more life, and the service could be a bit more welcoming and lively.

REPORTERS VISIT RESTAURANTS UNANNOUNCED, AND MEALS ARE PAID FOR BY REDEYE.
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