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FOREWORD REVIEW ♥♥♥♥♥ COOKING

Takashi's Noodles

Takashi Yagihashi
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A short list of the most revered Midwestern restaurant chefs over the past twenty-five years includes the likes of Charlie Trotter, Rick Bayless, Jean Joho, Rick Tramonto, Jimmy Schmidt, Michael Symon, and Taka-shi Yagihashi, former chef at metro Detroit's Tribute and Chicago's Ambria, and currently the chef/owner of Takashi in Chicago. As with the others, Yagihashi is a *Food & Wine* magazine Ten Best New Chefs award-winner. Japanese-born, his culinary style embraces, almost in equal parts, both Asian and French cuisine. While under Yagihashi's care, the *New York Times* named Tribute the best restaurant between New York and Chicago for its full embrace of haute cuisine with gentle though rapturous contributions from Asia's palate of intense flavors and meticulous albeit less fussy cooking techniques.

All of which adds intrigue to Yagihashi's decision to author a book (his first) on noodles, i.e., Japanese comfort food. One might liken this to Frank Lloyd Wright choosing to publish a treatise on garden shed design.

In truth, Japan makes use of noodles from all over the world. In his introduction, Yagihashi describes the gamut: "hearty buckwheat soba, chewy udon, vermicelli-like somen, and Chinese noodles, or ramen, which is extremely popular throughout the country. Pan-Asian noodles, from Thailand, Vietnam, and Korea, are also fashionable, as is Italian pasta, like the kind I first tasted back in Mito. But as these imports have be-come a part of the cuisine, they've adopted a uniquely Japanese character." In Yagihashi's hands, they are transformed into something divine.

He offers seventy-five recipes. Each chapter proceeds cautiously from the relatively simple, classic approach to each noodle type, for example "Hot Soba" is topped with dashi broth, pea pods, sliced scallions, and enoki mushrooms. More elaborate productions incorporate any number and type of ingredient from all corners of the earth. "Soba Gnocchi with Celery Root Foam" is a nod to both the Italian use of potato in pasta as well as the current molecular gastronomy movement.

Other unsuspecting ingredients include okra and grated Japanese mountain yam in another no-fuss soba dish, a spicy eggplant and pork sauce, curry and thinly sliced beef over wheat-based udon noodles, "Slow-Cooked Oxtails with Rice Noodles," and "Cassoulet of Crab," "Kimchi," and "Harusame." Yagihashi finishes with a dozen-plus hearty appetizers inspired by *izakayas*, (Japanese pubs).
MATT SUTHERLAND (February 13, 2009)

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