



GRAEME JENNINGS/EXAMINER

Chef Noriyuki Kudo of Yo! Sushi slices and dices plenty of fish for travelers passing through Union Station.

Noriyuki Kudo: Going fishing

By Alexandra Greeley
Special to The Washington Examiner

Wearing a short ponytail and wielding a knife, Noriyuki Kudo is not a samurai warrior but instead the executive chef of D.C.'s hottest sushi place, Yo! Sushi, located on the ground floor of Union Station. Instead, the knife he sharpens daily he uses to skillfully slice the freshest fish — and probably assorted other ingredients — into bite-size treats for the busy restaurant's clientele.

With numerous locations in England and elsewhere in Europe, Yo! Sushi has now embarked on an American venture with the opening of this, the first of its U.S. locations. And while sushi places are proliferating in the area, Yo! Sushi stands out for its conveyor belt, packed with sushi, sashimi and other Japanese specialties. Patrons can snag appealing offerings from the belt, and if anyone is still hungry or wants other samplings, management provides a menu booklet. And because the conveyor belt means adjacent seating, patrons get an upfront view of the kitchen activities. Among those scurrying about, of course, is Kudo himself.

A native of Kyushu, Japan, Kudo grew up learning the time-honored basics of Japanese cooking, having worked in a local restaurant doing prep work. As a teenager, Kudo moved to the Los Angeles area, where he got a job with a leading kaiseki chef at Makoto Sushi. He worked there for more than seven years, and received intensive train-

If you go Yo! Sushi

- » **Where:** Union Station, West Hall, 50 Massachusetts Ave. NE
- » **Info:** 202-408-1716; yosushi.com
- » **Hours:** 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Monday to Saturday, noon to 6 p.m. Sunday

ing in very traditional Japanese cuisine. "He was old-school," says Kudo. "I learned all the traditional skills." Plus, says Kudo, his mother and grandmother were exemplary cooks, using the customary flavors and ingredients of Japanese dishes.

From Los Angeles Kudo moved on to Santa Monica; he worked at Sushi Roku in Santa Monica, Pasadena, and West Hollywood, where he eventually became executive chef. Noted as a "polished casual" sushi restaurant, it offered Kudo the chance to further hone his sushi-making skills.

While preparing sushi and other traditional Japanese dishes may not leave much room for flamboyant experimentation, Kudo believes that he can bring eye and palate appeal to each presentation by adding extra flavors and texture. However, he emphasizes, he will always keep his rice cooking and presentation traditional. "It will always be fluffy," he says. "I won't compromise with that." He adds that he uses medium-grain rice that

What is your comfort food?

I love eating noodles, such as cold, chilled buckwheat noodles in the summer, or I love all ramen noodles.

What's in your fridge?

Yuzu pepper paste, so when I get tired, I make something and put this on it.

What is your luckiest moment?

I get to be involved in this great concept and bring new items to D.C.

What has been the greatest influence on your cooking style?

The restaurant in Los Angeles where I worked ... that was the most influential.

Where is your favorite place in the world?

Home.

he rinses for 20 minutes, drains and refrigerates overnight before cooking.

In the D.C. area, Kudo has found that his patrons prefer the tuna and salmon offerings, and especially popular are the California roll and the spicy tuna roll. "I want to bring in albacore tuna," he says. "It is white tuna and is becoming very popular." And as he concludes, his sushi creations are inspired by several observations he has made here: People love spicy, crunchy and tangy food.

The Vine Guy » Scott Greenberg

The Truth behind Worthy and Axios is Gus Kalaris

Local wine distributor Constantine "Gus" Kalaris could very well be one of the nicest people in the wine business. He routinely prefers a bear hug to a handshake, and his broad smile and deep laugh are genuinely infectious. We met about a decade ago at the release party of the first vintage of his flagship wine, Axios. I had a hunch back then that Gus would one day be a big deal in the wine world. I was right.

Kalaris fell in love with wine while doing a stint as a maitre d' in a Virginia restaurant, then later expanded his knowledge of the business side of wine while working with a wholesaler. He quickly developed a reputation for finding great wines throughout a wide range of price points.

In 1986, Gus took the plunge and founded Constantine Wines, a local distributor that represents notable high-end wines as well as many popular, affordable brands. But just selling wines was not enough. So in 1998, Gus founded Axios (Greek for "worthy"), a concept based on two principles: making the kind of wines that Gus likes to enjoy with friends over a meal, and making wines that he can be proud to offer his clients. Kalaris tapped longtime winemaking consultant Bob Egelhoff to partner with on the project. They have a shared vision of producing top-flight wines from quality grapes with minimal intervention.

Recently, Kalaris and I got together with a group of friends to taste through his portfolio. Even though his wines are a huge success, his biggest passion remains his family, including his wife, Lynne, and their two children — who have a few wines named in their honor. Retail prices are approximate.

The **2011 Worthy Five Clone Sauvignon Blanc (\$23)**, from Napa Valley, is like drinking summer in a glass. Scents of grapefruit and orange blossom burst through on the fragrant bouquet. The slightly creamy body carries flavors of tropical fruit and nectarine throughout the palate and onto the nicely balanced finish, ending with a pop of refreshing lemon/line citrus. **QPR 9**

In wine there is truth, and in the **2010 Truth (\$25)** there is really good wine, produced using the five classic bordeaux varietals. It is a very pretty, well-balanced red blend with delicious notes of dark berry fruit and sweet tannins. The medium-bodied finish highlights notes of cocoa and plum. **QPR 8.5**

Named after Gus and Lynn's daughter, the **2008 Worthy Sophia's Cuvee Red Wine Blend (\$30)**, from

Napa Valley, is built around the cabernet sauvignon — about 60 percent — that doesn't make it into Axios. Cabernet franc, merlot, petit verdot and malbec are added to produce a gorgeous wine with rich, deep flavors of black plum, cassis and blackberry jam. The finish is long and complex with layers of cocoa, dark berry and vanilla that persist for more than a minute. This is a big, luscious wine, worth twice the price. **QPR 10**

In 2012, Gus launched the Kalaris brand to introduce an artisan approach to making wines with minimal intervention. The **2011 Kalaris Chardonnay (\$50)**, from Napa Valley, is simply delicious. Aged in 100 percent new French oak, the lush flavors of apple, pear, white peach and creamy buttered toast glide across the tongue on the way to a beautifully balanced finish. Bright acidity adds a refreshing crispness and keeps the wine focused. **QPR 9.5**

Kalaris and Egelhoff also make a beautiful pinot noir from fruit grown in the southernmost region of the Sonoma Coast. The **2010 Kalaris Pinot Noir (\$55)** is a ripe, succulent pinot with flavors of dark plum, chewy cherry and black raspberry that feel both delicate and powerful at the same time on the tongue. The finish is lovely and structured, featuring a hint of wild strawberry on the back of the tongue. **QPR 9**

Gus' flagship wine is the **2007 Axios Cabernet Sauvignon (\$125)**, from Napa Valley. Vanilla, blackberry and tobacco scents dominate the nose. Blackberry liqueur, dark cassis, black plums and dark chocolate flavors are supported by firm tannins on a balanced frame. The powerful, uberlong finish features notes of blackberry fruit, vanilla and a hint of roasted coffee. **QPR 9**

Note: QPR is a rating system that compares the quality a wine delivers relative to the price. A QPR of 10 is considered an excellent value.



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