

SUSHI YA-YA YUM

Raw fish with bite BY TED SHORACK

If you've got a hankering for some spicy tuna or pork and don't mind a little forehead sweat, Sushi Ya has peppery appetizers, signature sushi rolls and a mean bento to satisfy the need.

The downtown Eugene restaurant opened in 2008, and owner Yunhee Song has utilized the limited space by elegantly arranging a paper globe-lit dining room and a short-but-sweet bar setup. On the first floor of the Tiffany Building, at the intersection of Willamette and East 8th, Sushi Ya is a short walk from a weekday job or weekend bar blitz downtown.

The restaurant appears unassuming at first glance, but the bar — with only six seats and a small glass case for viewing — has a wonderful oval granite backdrop with a large tin fish and vibrant collection of sake on display. To the right hangs a flat screen TV for those interested in catching a game with a few sake bombs.



(LEFT) CHEF PAUL HONG PREPARES A "GO DUCKS" ROLL
(RIGHT) SUSHI YA'S FIRECRACKER ROLL

PHOTOS BY TODD COOPER

But before indulging in some rice wine, start your meal with a bang. The appetizer at the top of Ya's list, the "Firecracker," comes on a bed of shredded cabbage as four halves of tempura-fried jalapeños stuffed with spicy tuna, cream cheese, unagi sauce and a drizzle of spicy mayo for each. The overwhelming kick is absent, with no sign of the pepper's seeds, but the presentation and combination of flavors make up for it.

Lovers of spicy rolls should try the reasonably priced spicy tuna or spicy yellowtail rolls. Served on a beautiful square plate, the two make a great combination for 11 bucks. If you're willing to spend a little more for a tingling tongue, the Hawaii volcano roll and "TNT" crunchy sushi roll are a good start. Both start off with spicy tuna and build up with masago (roe from a small fish), unagi or crab and are priced at \$9.50 and \$11.50.

Another favorite is the "GO DUCKS" roll with albacore, avocado, green onion and topped with a creamy spicy

sauce. This past football season, the restaurant treated Duck fans and others to 30 percent off all food on winning game days.

Sushi Ya's head chef, Paul Hong, says he is especially proud of their spicy pork bento, which comes as a combo with a California roll, potstickers, kobachi and miso soup. The generous portion costs \$10.95 and can tend to that desire for the spicier side of life.

The restaurant draws a crowd on weekend nights, owner Song says, with its midnight closing time. She also says the 30-percent happy hour between 3 and 5 pm is a great time to stop by, with a dozen kinds of cold sake, seven of hot sake, wine, beer and, well, what else do you really need?

Ya's alluring street-side booths, with upright bamboo racks around the perimeter, make it a cozy place to sit for dinner and people-watching while enjoying a full range of the menu's options. ■

Sushi Ya is located at 5 E. 5th Ave., 686-3464, www.eugenesushiya.com

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