

IN THE KITCHEN WITH

# (JUN MAKINO)

Creative and Humble Local Chef Jun Makino Creates His Own Blend of Cuisine

ARTICLE JODI HORNER | PHOTOGRAPHY RAEMI VERMIGLIO

**J**un Makino has known nothing but fine food his entire life. Born into a culinary family, he grew up in Pasadena, watching his father prepare impressive meals in the restaurants he owned. From a young age, Makino provided assistance in their kitchens. In turn, the chefs imbued their expertise upon the young Makino. So perhaps it was his birthright that he should own one of the hottest spots in town for fine dining.

A fixture for over 13 years, Junz is located in the shopping hub of Parker off Dransfeldt Road between Twenty Mile and Mainstreet. As we sit in his restaurant on an uncharacteristically rainy afternoon, Makino is dressed down in a black tee and black & white camouflage fatigues. His casual style reminds me of an artist who is too focused on his craft to tend to formalities.

He recalls the beginnings of his professional career in Las Vegas, working at the famous Napa restaurant located in the Rio Casino. There, he trained old-school style as an apprentice with celebrity French chef Jean-Louie Palladin. The experience refined his skills and stimulated his creativity. Palladin's approach made a permanent impression on Makino; everything he touches now bears the mark of the French chef's influence, even the name of his restaurant.

"I picked a 'z' for a little French influence," says Makino of the spelling.

The marquee may say "Japanese Dining," but Junz provides an array of Makino's own creations, with French touches throughout the menu. "I won't call it fusion," Makino insists, speaking of the marriage between his Japanese and

French cuisine. "Our sauce is very traditional but French influenced, so we use a lot of cream, a lot of butter. It's probably more than (the) Japanese would use."

Although he has established himself as a chef's chef, the food itself isn't his greatest motivator. "I like taking care of my staff. A lot of them have been with me for well over ten years," Makino says. "I like to make my customers enjoy their food, I hear their compliments, and I get very motivated."

Makino especially appreciates his bolder clients. "I have some customers that are not too adventurous, they stick with the regular California rolls and the fried stuff. People that are adventurous, they start shooting oyster shots," he smiles.

In the evening, Junz showcases its popularity with a packed parking lot. Makino now dons a classic black chef's jacket. He is front and center at the sushi bar, with a company of at least six sushi chefs surrounding him as he expedites outbound dishes.

I start with calamari and unagi, known in English as freshwater eel. When the appetizers arrive, the tender calamari is lightly fried and served with soy sauce. Unagi lives up to its exotic name, a splay of eel across a roll of rice, with a light, salty taste.

Between the appetizer and entree, I sip a crisp martini called The Jun. When the main course arrives — sea bass — my heart begins a happy dance. A dish for which he is locally renowned, the sea bass is moist and perfectly cooked. The bed of risotto rice is buttery and lovingly complements the bass. I have now tasted the way Makino's perfectionism and creativity have thrust Junz into the delight of Parker.

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