

REVIEWS

AND CRITICISM



NEW YORK THIS YEAR'S MODEL

IN DECADES PAST, WE'VE FALLEN HARD FOR FRENCH AND REVELED IN RUSTIC ITALIAN. BUT THESE DAYS MANHATTAN IS ALL ABOUT JAPANESE BY JAY CHESHES

IT'S BEEN TEN YEARS since Nobu Matsuhisa first came east to New York to open what was then the city's only stylish destination for innovative Japanese food. Nobu parlayed his success here into a far-flung empire. Oddly enough, though, he was the only one cashing in on the clearly winning formula. Until now.

The marriage of Japanese cuisine and a genuinely plugged-in vibe is this year's biggest thing. Three recently opened hotels all serve fare that's at

least inspired by Japan, and uptown the same aristocrats who have long piled into Serafina for Italian food in a setting made for preening are now packed in at Geisha, nibbling on sushi rolls and salty *edamame*. One third of a Japanese pop act has opened Sumile, down in the Village, and Masa Takayama is serving the city's priciest, and perhaps finest, meals over at the Time Warner Center.

And then of course there's *Megu*, the most eccentric new spot of all. Aromas of charcoal and searing meat cascade

through this enormous TriBeCa fun-house, a restaurant-cum-theme-park from the mind of young Japanese mogul Koji Imai. At the entrance stands an imperious Rising Sun mosaic, and in the dining room there's a 1,200-pound bell modeled on one from an eighth-century Buddhist temple. Five million dollars went into the 13,000-square-foot space. Plus there's the cost of the ice-sculpted

From the whimsical mind of Sumile's Josh DeChellis: *toro tartare with hot pepper, osetra caviar, and pickled abalone.*

