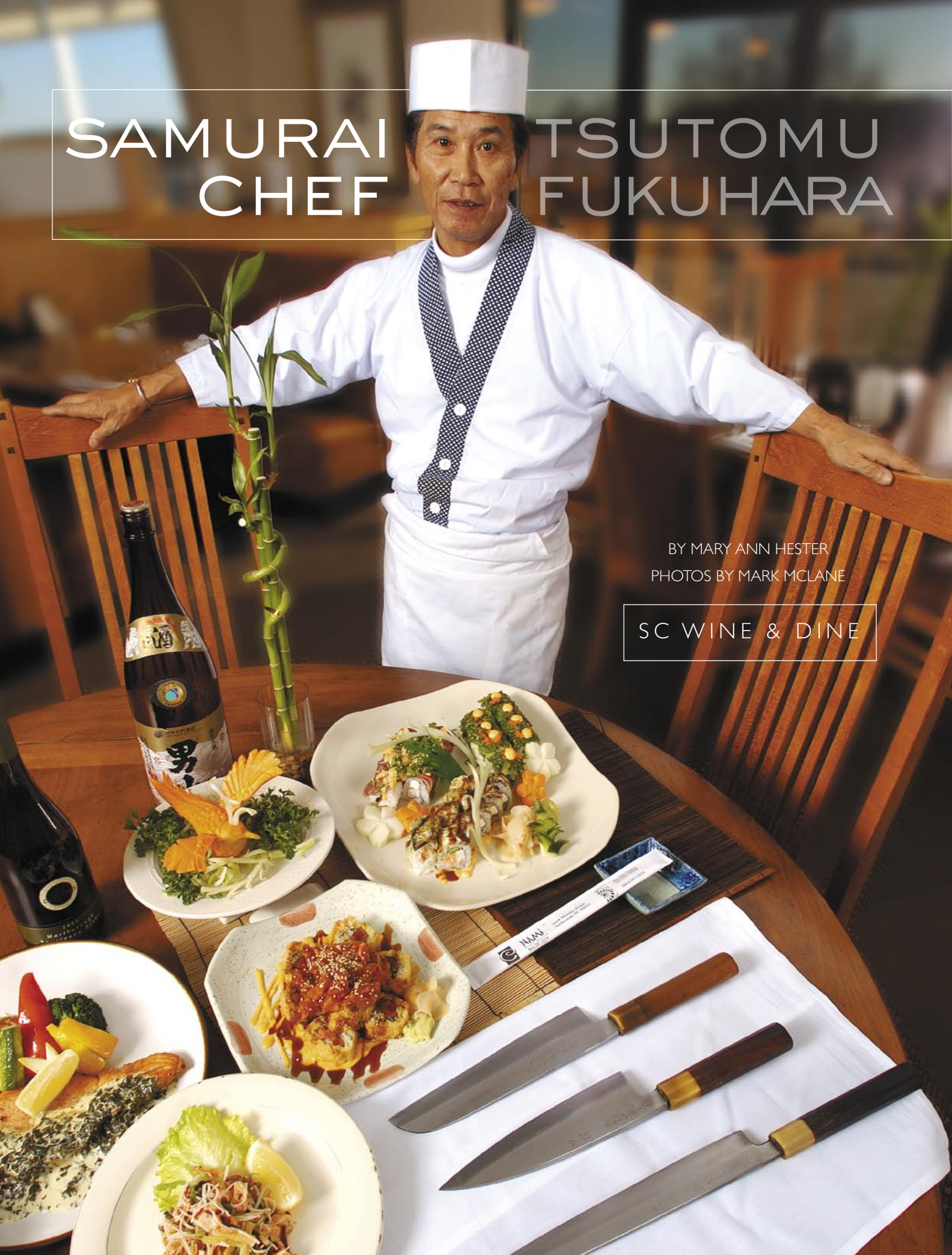


SAMURAI
CHEF

TSUTOMU
FUKUHARA

BY MARY ANN HESTER
PHOTOS BY MARK MCLANE

SC WINE & DINE





RESTING IN THE CENTER OF JAPAN, THE ANCIENT CITY OF NARA HAS THE KIND OF SECURITY ABOUT ITS IDENTITY THAT ALLOWS IT TO BLEND THE BEST OF ANCIENT TRADITIONS WITH THE WONDERS OF MODERN CIVILIZATION. LOCATED ON THE EAST END OF THE EURASIAN CONTINENT, NARA WAS ONCE THE TERMINATION POINT OF THE EAST END OF THE SILK ROAD. GROWING UP IN NARA MEANS LEARNING TO HONOR TRADITION WHILE MOVING INTO WHATEVER THE FUTURE BRINGS.

For at least one Nara native, honoring tradition and moving into the future means relocating to the other side of the world. The journey that has been Chef Tsutomu Fukuhara's career to date has taken him from Nara to Dallas to Atlanta to Greenville to his latest restaurant, which rests on the banks of Lake Hartwell.

Twenty-seven years ago, the owners of a restaurant in a city much younger than Nara wanted to offer clients a blend of the best of an ancient culture with the dynamism of their city. Nothing less than an authentic, world-class Japanese chef would do. So it was that they wooed Tsutomu Fukuhara away from Nara and into a new life in Dallas.

For the next ten years, as Chef Fukuhara laid out the finest of his country's culinary traditions for patrons night after night, he garnered recognition throughout the city and beyond. Word of his success spread in culinary circles. In almost no time, Atlanta's Hama Restaurant came courting.

Hama was one of the first traditional Japanese style restaurants in the city and a hot spot for Atlantans wanting to try something different. Some ten years later, the owner of Greenville's

future Nippon Cultural Center asked Chef Fukuhara to come make sure their restaurant, Yagoto, "grew up right." Under Chef Fukuhara's guidance, Yagoto was quickly embraced by serious food lovers.

To comprehend the depth of what Chef Fukuhara has achieved at restaurants takes some understanding of his training in Japan. He studied for ten years under his "cooking fathers." Along with an overall "cooking father" mentor, he had three other "fathers" who trained him in knives, sauce tasting and fish, respectively. In each of these specialties he had to learn not only the particulars, but the philosophy behind it as well. The intense Samurai-like training was as much social as culinary, teaching pupils to master first the basics before moving on to the higher level of skill that involved both the mind and the body.

In addition to his rigorous training, Chef Fukuhara also has a blowfish license. As blowfish, or Fugu, contains a nerve-shattering compound that is 1,200 times more deadly than cyanide, a two-to-three year apprenticeship is required before a chef is allowed to take

RECIPE: THE SAMURAI

(The most popular dish at the restaurant!)

SPICY TUNA ROLL

Fresh tuna, chopped finely
Nami Sauce*

Korean Hot Sauce

Mix tuna with Nami and Korean Hot Sauce. Proportions should be 2:1 (2 Nami, 1 Hot Sauce)

Put one palm of prepared sushi rice on seasoned seaweed (nori), seaweed side up. Add spicy tuna across the roll. Roll sushi up using two hands. Press with a bamboo mat to form.

SAMURAI ROLL

Take spicy tuna roll and dust with flour. On top of flour, add an egg wash. Then roll in panko bread crumbs and deep fry 20-30 seconds until golden brown. Cut into eight pieces and stack on a plate. Add raw, thinly sliced



tuna on top of the roll, then apply kabayaki sauce and sesame seeds to the top.

*NAMI SAUCE:

3 parts mayonnaise, 2 parts Japanese mayonnaise; add hot sauce, pinch of sesame paste and saki to taste. Kabayaki sauce and sushi vinegar (to make sushi rice) can be purchased at Asian grocery stores.

the test. Both handling and carving the spiked fish must be done with care, ensuring only about 30 percent of the applicants pass the test. Chef Fukuhara was so skilled at Fugu that he also trained students, but he does not seem to miss the stress of this potentially toxic fish as, "it is only served in the larger cities in the US and not many of them."

When the Nippon Center closed, a fellow chef who was working at Nami Asian Bistro at Portman Marina suggested that Chef Fukuhara come in to help with the struggling concept of a



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sushi restaurant on a southern lake. Nami, the brainchild of David Freeman who owns Portman Marina, was not “growing up right,” so Chef Fukuhara reinvented the kitchen, brining it more in line with the traditional systematic, respectful, culturally-oriented style of Japan

Chef Fukuhara, ever humble, is quick to give David Freeman credit. These two gentlemen, who grew up a world apart, share the philosophy that, “the customer is the most important thing and the best way to keep them coming back for more is through constant innovation, finding the best ingredients possible and a providing a restful environment in which to dine.” Sounds simple, but it also means that the emphasis cannot be strictly on the bottom line. Chef Fukuhara truly believes that anything is possible at his restaurant and he constantly challenges himself to accommodate particular requests. He still loves to be “hands-on,” and it is not unusual to see him at the sushi bar wielding his knives while talking with customers and overseeing what is happening in the rest of the dining room. He says he is “not enticed by

the big city restaurants where he would be more of an overseer than chef.” He prefers to utilize his training and experience, passing along both to some of the American staff at Nami. He is the “cooking father” to young Bryan Williams, whom he handpicked from the nearby Galley Restaurant. They have cultivated a respectful father-son relationship they both seem to enjoy.

Nami translates as “wave,” and that is exactly what Chef Fukuhara has created at Portman Marina, welcoming diners from Georgia and South Carolina alike.

His passion and training come through in every dish that leaves the kitchen and to sit at the sushi bar is to be both entertained and fed exquisite food. Nami is one of those hidden gems in South Carolina that make dining in the state a real pleasure. **SCM**

Getting There



Nami is located at 1629 Marina R.d. at Portman Marina on Lake Hartwell in Anderson and is accessible via I-85. 864-287-3219

Family and Domestic Law

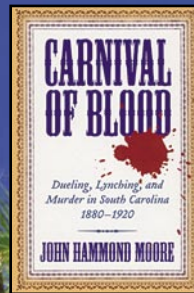
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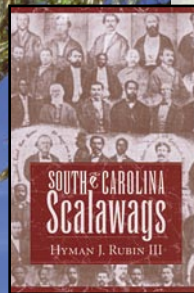
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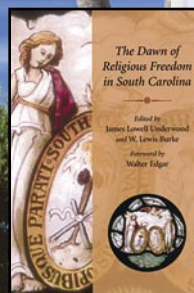


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