

“Eating here is not simply about having a meal – it’s an experience. Being able to watch the chefs at work is like culinary theatre”

Sundaram Tagore on Zuma

Since opening his eponymous gallery on Hollywood Road in 2008, Sundaram Tagore has become well acquainted with Zuma, for it was here that the art expert and lover of all things Japanese held his launch party.

One dish that he remembers going down particularly well as it was circulated among the throng of guests was the fried squid. “It’s delicious because it’s so light and just melts in the mouth,” comments Tagore. This effect is achieved by the restaurant’s use of rice starch instead of wheat flour to make the bite-sized squid balls, which are then deep-fried and subtly flavoured with a gentle sprinkling of green chilli and a dash of lime.

Another favourite is the *hacho miso* marinated lamb chop with homemade pickles, which prompts soft murmurings of appreciation from Tagore as he becomes reacquainted with the dish in the 12-seat private room in the far corner of the restaurant. As with the squid, it is the lightness of the dish that he values. “Meat dishes can be so heavy, but both the quality of the meat and the delicate preparation of the dish ensure that this one isn’t,” he says. Imported from New Zealand, the lamb originates from a farm that also raises Wagyu beef cows, and like those cosseted heifers, the lambs are well looked after to guarantee maximum taste.

It’s not just the food that makes Zuma such a knockout for Tagore, however. “Eating here is not simply about having a meal – it’s an experience. I like to start my evening off with a drink, maybe a whisky or cold cloudy sake, before heading downstairs – I know the owner quite well now, so he usually reserves a good table for me. Once I’m in the lounge, I enjoy the open kitchen, as being able to watch the chefs at work is like culinary theatre,” he enthuses. Tagore also feels that the grand spiral staircase adds an agreeable touch of drama. “You feel like you’re really making an entrance,” he says.

Zuma’s sensational decor, dreamed up by the master of modern Japanese restaurant design, Noriyoshi Muramatsu, also sits well with Tagore’s tastes. “It manages to be sumptuous yet very contemporary and I love the attention to detail, like the windows,” he says, referring to the bubble motif adorning the glass partition in the private room.

Tagore, who also owns galleries in his adopted home town of New York, and Beverly Hills in Los Angeles, decided to set up in Hong Kong as he loves the unchecked energy of the city. “As with New York, it’s very cosmopolitan and there’s always something going on here.” Tagore also appreciates the ease and convenience of Hong Kong, which he cites as a major reason for establishing a presence here.



When in town, he naturally needs to cast his professional eye over the works displayed in the neighbouring art galleries dotted along Hollywood Road. As Tagore’s gallery is a showcase for both Eastern and Western artists, this former director of the prestigious Pace Wildenstein gallery must pay close attention to what’s happening in the art world in every corner of the globe. Once his working day is over, he may well venture out of the galleries and into the chic surrounds of Zuma. “From the stunning decor to the magnificent food, Zuma is a feast for all the senses, and that’s why I like it so much,” he concludes.



Clockwise from left: Sundaram Tagore says dining at Zuma is an experience; *yaki hotate no ume shiso yaki* – grilled Hokkaido scallops with umeboshi, shiso and mentaiko; *ika no kari kari age* – crispy fried squid with green chilli salt and lime



CHEF RAINER BECKER

Chef Rainer Becker took London by storm when he founded Zuma in 2001, followed by Roka in 2004. “It’s not traditional Japanese, it’s contemporary Japanese,” he says. The Hong Kong branch that opened in 2007 represented a chance to extend his vision. “I always try to bring design to the next level, to do something different because otherwise it becomes boring for me. Executive Chef Dan Segall is a great talent here; he’s doing a very good job. I don’t really have one favourite dish; I love sushi, just the plain sushi; I like the spicy beef here; I like tiger prawns; I like the sea bass sashimi and the tuna.”



ZUMA
RESERVATIONS: Recommended **DRESS CODE:** Casual **LUNCH HOURS:** 12:00pm - 3:00pm **DINNER HOURS:** 6:00pm - 11:00pm **SET MENU:** Lunch and dinner **BUFFETS:** No **VEGETARIAN DISHES:** 10+ **AMENITIES:** Separate bar, DJ, private room for 25 **CAR VALET:** Yes **CREDIT CARDS:** AE, V, MC **YEAR ESTABLISHED:** 2007

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