

At the end of 2008 Joël Robuchon launched YOSHI, a few yards across the hallway from his much-loved destination dining room at the Metropole Hotel in Monaco. YOSHI looks like a ryokan revised for the canteen deck of an intergalactic space cruiser, and opens on to a Japanese-style garden. If Robuchon gets it right – and he hasn't wrong footed to date – YOSHI will do more to reinvent high-end Japanese dining than Nobu, and could inspire multiple spin-offs.

As always, Robuchon has been involved in each element of the concept.

'I want YOSHI to be contemporary, elegant, feminine, glamorous and poetic; the modern vision I have of Japan, like a gem.'

Such is the holistic approach of the man who was hailed as 'chef of the century' by Gault Millau in 1989, and who looks set to be considered a legend for many years to come.

While other chefs deemed masters of the culinary universe have critics sharpening knives at each franchised opening – think of every new Ducasse

or Ramsay – Robuchon is the chef that everyone loves unreservedly. When he opened a branch of L'Atelier de Joël Robuchon in London in 2006 with eyebrow-raising prices, critics gave all but a standing ovation at the sheer genius of his cuisine.

'The dishes I create never include more than three ingredients,' he says. 'It's the only way to respect the flavours of the ingredients.'

Simplicity may not be the first thing that comes to mind with French post-nouvelle haute cuisine, but it's fundamental to Robuchon's philosophy.

'People often try to make things too complicated,' he says. 'When going to a restaurant, customers want the message to be straightforward, and it should be obvious from what they see the moment they walk into the room.'

Robuchon steers the style of his restaurants by their geography and context. 'I always take into account the local culture,' he says. 'In Las Vegas the restaurant Joël Robuchon looks like a mansion with a feel of Tuscany. Its oversized sofas, art deco chandeliers, and cream and purple tones make a great contrast with the

modern design of the neighbouring casinos.'

The YOSHI menu was developed to talent-show style. New dishes created with head chef Takeo Yamazaki were given marks out of 20 at each tasting and any dish scoring an average below 18 were shown the door. Only dishes that achieved 20 out of 20 from each taster made it to the final menu.

The creation of YOSHI would seem long overdue. Robuchon's love affair with Japan is as long as his career, beginning when he started visiting the country in the mid-1970s.

'By the early 1980s I remember serving al dente asparagus in my Parisian restaurant,' he says. 'In Europe vegetables were being served well cooked, the opposite of in Japan. Customers sent back their dishes saying the asparagus was not cooked. Of course I changed the dish. I realised that it would take a while to convert the Europeans to a new way of cooking, so I took it slowly. Now I feel that I am consecrating my love for Japan and offering my own vision of it to the west.' ■

# NOUVELLE JAPAN

Joël Robuchon, the world's most Michelin-starred chef, talks to Mark C O'Flaherty about reinventing the Japanese restaurant for 21st century Europe through his latest venture, YOSHI in Monaco.



## YOSHI SPECIALS

Sushi lunch - €90  
Menu Yoshi - €115  
Menu Kaiseki - €195

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