

Tyson Cole wins over sushi lovers with innovative style

SHELLEY ORMAN
STAFF WRITER

Sushi chef Tyson Cole's success isn't something he's cooked up overnight. He doesn't have a secret recipe, but rather his journey to becoming one of the nation's foremost sushi chefs has called for plenty of long hours in the kitchen, a lot of raw talent and a dash of luck.

The creator and Executive Chef at Uchi, Austin's famed nouveau sushi restaurant, Cole started at the very bottom of the food industry as a dishwasher at Kyoto, a Japanese restaurant in downtown Austin. It was there where he was first introduced to what would become his passion and eventually change his life.

"I started watching the sushi chefs make the sushi, and I was just taken by it because it looked like so much fun," Cole says. "It looked like they were playing. I'd never seen that kind of food before."

From that moment on, Cole begged and pleaded with Kyoto to give him a chance to learn the art, yet management steadfastly refused since he wasn't Japanese. Eventually, out of necessity, he was allowed to make sushi twice a week — as long as he stayed out of sight, cooking in the kitchen.

In total, Cole spent about three and a half years at Kyoto, becoming personal friends with the sushi chefs and learning all he could from them — including an addiction to a Japanese-language cult phenomenon, television's "Iron Chef" — and ultimately becoming the restaurant's head sushi chef.

After Kyoto, Cole moved on to another Austin sushi restaurant, Musashino, working under sushi Chef Takehiko Fuse, where

he learned to speak Japanese and break away from the old-school, traditional sushi techniques.

Cole worked at Musashino for six and half years before opening Uchi.

"After working for others for more than 10 years, I was ready to do what I wanted to do, which was make sushi more accessible to American people," Cole says.

For Uchi, this meant he wanted to combine items that Americans liked such as fruits with raw fish, a definite no-no in traditional sushi restaurants.

It's been a little more than four years since Cole opened Uchi, but his achievements haven't stopped there. In 2005, two years after Uchi's opening, Cole was named one of *Food and Wine* magazine's prestigious Best New Chefs, an honor which has garnered him national attention.

The restaurant, which is open 37 hours a week, regularly brings in \$90,000 to \$100,000 per week, and has a two-hour wait most nights. In the spring of 2008, Cole is opening an entirely new concept — a high-end sake/raw bar, next door and connected to Uchi.

But Cole's most excited right now over an upcoming appearance on "Iron Chef America." He may even have the opportunity to battle it out with Iron Chef Masaharu Morimoto, who's famous for his work at world-famous New York sushi restaurant Nobu.

Cole has watched Morimoto on "Iron Chef" since before it was broadcast in America.

"I tried to explain to [the network] when they called that watching the show is what got me into this in the first place," he says. "Now it's so crazy to think about where I've gone and how I've come about this full circle."

BEST CHEF



BRETT BUCHANAN | ABJ

Uchi Chef Tyson Cole started off modestly as a dishwasher at Austin sushi restaurant Kyoto.