

35. Shag Roll Uchi

"On-the-fly concoctions can be great," says Uchi Executive Chef Tyson Cole. "Most of the time, though, they're not so good," he laughs. "We got lucky with the shag roll."

The shag sushi roll, one of Uchi's best sellers, began its evolution as the bond roll, which was stuffed with salmon, sun-dried tomato and fresh avocado, with Asian pear salsa on the side. About three months after Uchi opened, Jeromy Deblieux, co-owner of the now-defunct Shag Salon, sat down at the sushi bar and asked Cole to make an off-the-menu roll for him. Without giving it much thought, Cole drizzled a su'miso sauce (rice wine vinegar and white miso) mixed with a little squid ink on a plate and had the kitchen tempura a bond roll. "I thought it looked pretty good on the roll," recalls Cole. Deblieux liked the finished product so much that he told some friends, who told their friends, who ... well, let's just call it the buzz marketing effect. Uchi sells about 45 shag rolls a day.

"Food is like that," says Cole. "Sometimes spontaneity just works."

\$13. 801 S. Lamar Blvd., 916-4808,
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NOVEMBER 2007 AUSTIN MONTHLY 143

Talk



Battling the Champ

UCHI'S TYSON COLE GOES HEAD TO HEAD WITH IRON CHEF MORIMOTO

[by MELISSA DELANEY]

WAKING TO AN IRATE GIRLFRIEND demanding he "get a job today or get out," a then-22-year-old, unemployed Tyson Cole blanketed the city with job applications. Thinking Tyson was Japanese (it's not), the owner of Kyoto restaurant called him in to be a dishwasher.

After work, the Kyoto staff would drink whiskey at the Elephant Room, then go watch tapes of TV shows that the chefs' families mailed from Japan. Cole didn't understand a lick of Japanese, but he became addicted to the original *Iron Chef*, featuring Masaharu Morimoto, whose dishes at New York's Nobe restaurant attracted worldwide attention. "He's so cool," Cole thought.

Cole graduated from dishes to the grill to the sushi line. After a stint at Musashino, where he says he learned the true art of sushi, he went on to open his own wildly popular restaurant, Uchi. He was named one of the best new chefs of 2005 by *Food & Wine* magazine, and this September, at age 37, he went head-to-head against his hero, Morimoto, on *Iron Chef America*. (Cole's not sure when his episode airs, and he's being tight-lipped about who won until then, so you'll have to watch it to find out.)

Like Rocky Balboa's face-off with Apollo Creed, Cole went up against the champ. Balboa beat him to a bloody pulp. Cole slices fish with alarming precision. Otherwise, the similarities are striking. Have a look.

Balboa vs Cole

Balboa broke some thumbs during his early years as a loan shark's goon.

Trainer Mickey Goldmill told Balboa he couldn't keep his locker because he fought like an ape.

Mickey knocked on Balboa's door one night to offer to manage him.

Balboa cracked five raw eggs for his breakfast.

Balboa faced hundreds of boxers.

Balboa prepared for his fight with Creed by sparring with cow carcasses.

Balboa loved his pet turtles, Cuff and Link.

Balboa beat his punching bag so much, the stuffing came out.

Balboa spent years reeking of sweat.

Balboa watched dozens of boxing matches before his fight with Creed to study techniques and moves that he could apply in the ring.

Cole broke some plates during his early years as a dishwasher.

Musashino owner Smokey Fusa told Cole he'd never work for him because he couldn't read or write Japanese.

Smokey knocked on Cole's bedroom window one night to offer him a job.

Cole chopped thousands of raw green onions for customers' dinners.

Cole faced hundreds of breeds of fish.

Cole prepared for his job at Musashino by steaming batches of rice.

Cole loved his pet knife, a souvenir from Japan.

Cole sharpened his knife so much, it lost its shape.

Cole spent years reeking of fish.

Cole visited 27 New York restaurants in the three days before his cook-off. "Becoming a chef takes a lifetime," Cole explains. "You're always in training."