

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

WSJ.com

APRIL 9, 2011

An Utterly Fabu Shabu-Shabu

A life-changing midnight snack becomes a regular at-home dinner

By



Tara Donne for The Wall Street Journal, Food Styling by Martha Bernabe

Shabu-shabu

Growing up in Florida in the 1970s, I was raised on tuna noodle casseroles and meat loaf. Every once in while my family would splurge on steak and baked potatoes and when special holidays rolled around, my mom would break out the fondue pot, my favorite.

Japanese food didn't get its hooks into me until I was in college, when I took a part-time job at a Japanese restaurant in Austin called Kyoto. I worked my way up from dishwasher to cook, befriending most of the Japanese staff along the way. After work, the other chefs and I would hang out until the early morning hours drinking sake

and whisky. We'd watch Japanese anime and TV game shows on VHS tapes that their friends and families had sent over from Japan. There were tons of shows about food: sushi chef competitions, restaurant roulettes and cameras following people getting off trains and searching for the "next best" restaurant in a new town or city. One particularly addictive game show had chefs making rice balls by hand. The competition was to see which chef could best control the number of grains of rice per handful.

When the timer buzzed the chef would slam the rice ball on his cutting board. "Hai!" he would exclaim, at which point a slew of petite women clad in silken kimonos would flood the stage. They would get to work disassembling the rice ball and lining up each grain of rice, one by one, along a numbered scale. The crowd would wait with bated breath for the announcer to share the goal number along with the results. "Goal wa? 175! Contestant Take-san results? 166!" "Ahhhhhh!" the crowd would scream. It was the most addictive television I had ever watched. I should add that I didn't understand a word of it.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.
MOBILE READER

Download free
for BlackBerry® for
a limited time only.





Download free
for iPhone™ for
a limited time only.

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

WSJ.com



Tara Donne for The Wall Street Journal, Food Styling by Martha Bernabe

SWISH SUPPER: Every morsel takes a dip in the flavorful broth.

Around that time, I spent my days learning how to make sushi. At night I learned to cook traditional Japanese fare at head chef Kiyohisa Hara's apartment. He and the other chefs showed me how to make dishes such as yose nabe, miso jiru, oden, ton jiru and sukiyaki. One night Kiyō was sporting a particularly guilty smile and showed me some meat he'd snuck from the restaurant. "What are we making tonight?" I asked. "My favorite," he said. "Shabu-shabu!"

Kiyō took out his tabletop gas burner stove. He filled a clay nabe pot with water and placed a piece of kelp in it. "We're going to let that sit in the water as we prep the vegetables and meat," he said. We were going to cook the fresh ingredients in the pot of hot water on the table ourselves. Looking at all of the fresh ingredients, it dawned on me it was like the fondue I had grown up with,

but healthy.

Kiyō cut and prepped all the Japanese vegetables for the dish, and then made three personal dipping sauces for each of us to use. When the dashi water was hot enough, we dipped our food into the hot pot. Then we ate. And ate. The temperature contrast was amazing. Screaming-hot thin slices of fatty meat and scallions from the dashi water dipped into cold vinegar-based sauces like ponzu and miso-pon was possibly the best thing I'd ever eaten in my life. The acidity and brightness of the sauces matched with that fat of the meat and the crisp texture of the vegetables was absolutely amazing. Shabu-shabu became my new favorite dish.

Shabu-shabu isn't a dish we make at either of my restaurants because it requires a heating source on the table, but I love to make it at home for my family. Sourcing fresh seasonal vegetables and herbs from my wife Rebekkah's garden just pushes this dish over the top; things such as lemon sorrel, thai basil, Meyer lemon and coriander blossoms make it sing with freshness. You can prep almost all of the food ahead of time and just pull it out of the refrigerator, set the table and fire up the burner. And then it's time to eat, and eat some more.

Recipe: Shabu-Shabu

The name "shabu-shabu" literally means "swish-shish," based on the sound the meat makes as you drag it through the dashi stock. Meat and vegetables are cooked by hand with chopsticks, then dipped into sauces before eating.

TOTAL TIME: 2 Hours

ACTIVE TIME: 1 hour

SERVES: 2-4

½ sheet dried kombu (kelp)

Dash of white soy sauce

1½ pounds sliced thin cut beef (A fattier cut is best, like ribeye, belly or strip. You can ask your butcher to slice meat on a meat slicer, as if it were lunch meat.)

4 leaves Chinese cabbage, cleaned and sliced into bite-size pieces

3 leeks, cut into 1/8-inch rounds after cleaning

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

WSJ.com

8 fresh shiitake, sliced into wedges
 4 fresh matsutake, if available, sliced thinly lengthwise
 2 packs fresh enokitake, washed and ends cut off
 8 ounces watercress, bottoms washed and trimmed
 8 ounces chrysanthemum leaves
 2 packs soft tofu, cut into ¼-inch dice and washed
 4 scallions, washed and cut into 2-inch pieces

1. Set stove-top burner on table with large earthenware pot or heatproof pot.
2. Fill pot 75% with filtered water and add kombu and a dash of white soy sauce. Let broth sit 1 hour before cooking.
3. Meanwhile, cut and arrange all dipping ingredients (proteins and vegetables) on platter at table for service.
4. When broth is ready, remove kombu and turn on burner. Keep heat on medium during cooking so water doesn't get too hot and boil away.
5. When water is hot, use chopsticks to dip individual meat slices in the broth and swish around until meat has darkened, about 5 to 15 seconds. Remove and dip into accompanying sauces (recipes below).
6. Using chopsticks, drop vegetables into broth and let sit until desired doneness, usually about a minute. Dip into sauces before eating.

Miso-pon

A traditional dipping sauce of miso and vinegar.

4 tablespoons shiro miso paste
 2 tablespoons sugar
 1 tablespoon light soy sauce
 2 tablespoons sake (preferably Ginjo)
 5 tablespoons rice wine vinegar
 1 tablespoon sesame oil
 Pinch of fleur de sel

Mix all ingredients. Thin with water if needed.

Yuzu-pon

A light citrus dipping sauce made with yuzu and soy.

1½ cups rice wine vinegar
 ½ cup light soy
 ½ cup dashi stock (available at Asian markets)
 Juice from 6 fresh yuzu, about 4 ounces (lemon juice or bottled yuzu juice can be substituted)

Mix all ingredients. Thin with water if needed.

Printed in The Wall Street Journal, page D1

