

Sushi-Go! Fleet feasting BY BILL RODRIGUEZ

McDonald's may have given fast food a bad name and Carlo Petrini may have given the world-wide Slow Food movement cachet, but what's wrong with -- how should I put this -- prompt eats? The advantage came home to me the other day when Johnnie returned with a stack of containers she picked up on the run in Newport.

We enjoyed, at a leisurely pace, I might add, feasting on a pile of sushi that was none the worse for travel or the wait in a refrigerated case for much of the day. My spicy ebi maki, with shrimp, cucumber, and a spicy sauce, was a treat, as was a raw tuna and salmon combination dubbed a Newport roll. Even my companion's fish-free "super veggie roll" was a taste treat. It held a mini-salad, with avocado, cucumber, carrot, scallion, and an unfamiliar green item called takuwan, pickled radish.

Clearly, Sushi-Go! could as easily have been named Sushi-Yum!

I had to see this place myself, so a few days later we stepped into a Brick Market Place shop. Looking around, my first impression was of squeaky cleanliness, as you'd expect from a restaurant that serves raw fish, not to mention that Japanese surgical-masks-in-subways fetish about germs and hygiene. In a display case as you walk in are samples of fish and octopus so perfect they could be epoxy-resin facsimiles. On one wall, paintings of koi swim among three simulated screen panels. Blond wainscoting lines a wall next to four tall black lacquered tables and stools, joined by four matching two-seat tables are at the back of the place.

Behind the counter is Jefferson Dube, the friendly and knowledgeable proprietor. The mid-week evening wasn't busy yet, so he had a few minutes to talk about himself and his place, which opened just four months ago. For 10 previous years, he was in restaurant management at various places around the state. His father is Japanese and his mother Italian-American, but Dube chose to devote himself to the former cuisine only partially because there are more Italian restaurants around here than pepperoni on pizzas. His parents divorced when he was two, you see, and he was a young adult before he went to Japan to meet his birth father, so Dube has always been assessing his roots.

On a marker board behind him were some items, such as miso soup and pork dumplings, that were not on the elaborate brochure menu brought home by Johnnie. So we could share an unanticipated bowl of udon soup (\$3.75). It was in a plastic-topped to-go container, actually, but the noodles were fat and the broth was nicely salty with fermented soy paste, so we didn't miss the fancy porcelain. I'd also recommend the seaweed salad (\$4.25), a nice companion as we explored the sushi. Sesame oil tangs up a tangle of green shreds speckled with bits of what looks like kelp, and it's not at all fishy.

That last description also applies to the sashimi at Sushi-Go!, since in a piscine existential dilemma, a fish starts smelling fishy only when it's not fresh. Dube suggested the tai, and for \$3.50, four pink-tinged slices of the raw red snapper were fanned over some julienned daikon. Delicate and delicious.

Sushi prices run from \$3.50 for Johnnie's veggie roll, to \$9.25 for the "rainbow roll" that the sashimi tempted me to order. Raw slices of tuna, snapper, yellowtail, and salmon, plus cooked pieces of eel and shrimp, were draped atop sushi containing imitation crab. For the taste to come through, real crab, rather than flavored pollock, was needed, but I certainly didn't leave any of it behind. Preferring cooked fish, my companion had an unagi sushi (\$5.25), with freshwater eel, a favorite of hers.

Dube encourages customers to ask him to replicate any sushi combination they enjoy. Likewise, his nine-piece inside-out default sushi may be prepared as a traditional 12-piece seaweed-outside version.

The kitchen was out of Brickley's ginger ice cream, which usually is available alongside vanilla (\$3.50). Disappointment had to be assuaged -- and was, I might add -- by one of the dozen packaged Japanese snack candies available. The Lucky Mini-Almond chocolates (\$2.75) conveniently have finger-friendly edible handles. I'd also recommend the mochi (\$4), filled with sweetened red bean paste, and the kitchen-made inari (\$3), sweetened rice wrapped with tofu skin.

Come by the last hour when Sushi-Go! is open and all pre-rolled sushi are half-price -- and you'll still get your parking stub validated for a free hour. The inducements to check out this new place keep coming.

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dining out

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