

Traditional Japanese Health Food—Natto Culinary Professionals Interview

日本の伝統的健康食—納豆 料理のプロにインタビュー（最終回）

Interview ①: Sone Hiro, chef/owner of Terra and Ame restaurants

インタビュー①: 曾根ヒロ 「Terra」「AME」のオーナーシェフ

Owner/Chef Sone Hiro, of the two restaurants that have earned stars in the Michelin Guide, “Terra” in Napa and “Ame” in San Francisco, creates menus filled with Japanese ingredients incorporated in a polished presentation that fills one with a sense of the season. While being modern, it is the style of “Ame” to bring to life the flavors of traditional and simple Japanese ingredients. This time, we talked about the menu using *natto* fermented soybeans at the restaurant.

JRN: We have heard that at “Ame” there is a *natto* menu, but what kind of items are on it?

Sone: On the menu of the “Sashimi Bar,” there is an item, “Lisa’s Staff Meal” (Lisa is a manager at Mutual Trading and this is a meal that she furnishes to staff), and since last year that has been listed on the main menu. The dish is made up of squid *somen* noodles with salmon roe, okra and other things mixed in, seasoned with soy sauce simmered with bonito shavings. This is quite popular. There is an Option for *natto* as our “Sonoma Tezukuri (‘Homemade’) *Natto*,” which is served in a small bowl.

JRN: In real terms, how many orders

do you get? What is the reaction from people who eat *natto* for the first time?

Sone: We receive orders for the Option from about 50% of our guests. Practically everyone knows about *natto*, but for those who try it for the first time, there are a variety of reactions, you know. For those who do not like it, there are many people who feel an aversion to the texture on the palate. There is also the opinion that the taste resembles that of Camembert cheese, and I, myself, think that it is like that.

JRN: Perhaps the similarity in taste comes from the same fermentation in the product?

Sone: Because cheese is also a fermented product, there is a similarity in things like the creaminess and the characteristic smell, you see. With other cheeses as well, for example things such as Parmesan cheese that are well aged, there is something like a crystal formation that one can see floating in it. That may be considered a concentration of the deliciousness. I think there also exists this drawing out of the deliciousness that occurs during the fermentation

ニ シュランのスターを持
三 つ2つのレストラン、

ナパにある『Terra』、サンフランシスコの『Ame』のオーナーシェフである曾根氏がクリエイイトするメニューは、日本の食材をふんだんに盛り込んだ季節感溢れる洗練された内容。モダンでありながら、日本の伝統と素朴な食材の味が活きているのが『Ame』スタイル。今回同レストランの納豆メニューについて話を聞いた。

JRN: 『Ame』に納豆メニューがあると聞いたのですが、どんな内容ですか？

Sone: “sashimi bar”のメニューから「Lisa’s Staff Meal」（共同経営者リサさんのまかない料理）として去年からメニューに載せています。内容はイカそうめんに加え、イクラ、おくらなどを組み合わせ、鰹節といっしょに煮出した旨味醤油で味付けています。これが結構人気があるんです。納豆はオプションで、「Sonoma Tezukuri Natto」として小鉢でサービスしています。

JRN: 実際どのくらいの注文がありますか？初めて納豆を食べた方の反応はいかがでしょう？

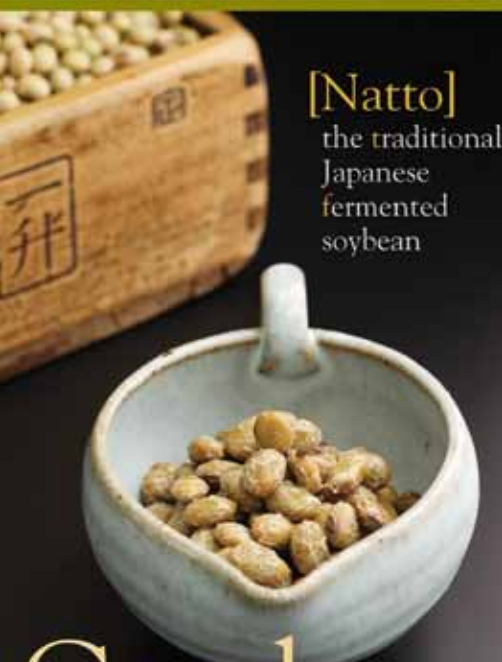
Sone: 50%くらいのお客さんからオプションの注文を受けます。納豆を知っている人がほとんどですが、初めて試される方の反応はそれぞれですね。嫌いな人は食感に抵抗がある人が多いです。カマンベールチーズに味が似ているという意見もありますが、僕自身も似ていると思います。

JRN: 同じ発酵食品という意味で味が似るのでしょうか？

Sone: チーズも発酵食品ですから、クリーミーで独特の臭さなどは似ていますね。他のチーズでも、例えば良くエイジングをしたパルメザンチーズなどにクリスタルのような浮いている結晶が見られます。そこに

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旨味が凝縮していると考えます。発酵の過程で味を引き出すのですこの旨味が納豆にも存在するのだと思います。アメリカ人にとって納豆は「豆料理」の一部と考えますから、「発酵豆」として独特の香りもある程度予想して注文する人が多いです。

JRN: 納豆をアメリカ人にサービスするのに、抵抗は無かったですか？

Sone: まずは『Ame』のスタッフ全員に食べてもらい反応を伺いました。初めは慣れない味と食感で嫌いな人が多かったのですが、今では好きな人が増えています。納豆の中にある「苦味」は、経験するごとにクセになっていく性質を持っているんです。苦味は大人が経験から学ぶものなので、だんだん好きになる現象が見られます。でも食感が苦手な人は料理法を変えるという事もできますね。

process of *natto*. Since Americans think of *natto* as a classification under “soybean cuisine,” there are many people who order it anticipating that as “fermented soybeans,” to a certain extent it will have a characteristic aroma.

JRN: Has there been no resistance in serving *natto* to Americans?

Sone: First, we had all of the staff at “Ame” eat it. There were many people who were not used to the taste at first, and disliked it and the texture on the palate, but now the number of people who like it is growing. Among the *natto* varieties, there is “*nigami*” (“bitter”), which has a nature that, the more one experiences it, the more it becomes a habit. *Nigami* is an experience that one encounters as an adult, so there is a phenomenon being seen of the number of those liking it gradually growing. However, for those who find that texture on the palate disagreeable, one can also change the way of preparing it in a dish, you know.

JRN: Can you offer recipes and the like in order to make Americans more familiar with *natto*?

Sone: There are many Americans who dislike a



Chef Hiro Sone

Chef Hiro Sone is a chef who creates an innovative cuisine mixing unexpected flavors from Italy, France and Asia. Hiro Sone and Lissa Doumani, the celebrated duo behind the acclaimed Terra Restaurant, which opened in the Napa Valley in 1988, opened their first restaurant in San Francisco, Ame, in 2006. The menu there showcases seasonal New American cuisine featuring fresh ingredients from local purveyors. In 2003, Sone was the winner of the James Bread Foundation’s “Best Chef of California.”

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sticky texture on the palate, so wouldn't it be good to cook it before serving, so that it is easier to eat? For example, ploys such as putting it into a pancake or wrapping it in *nori* seaweed would perhaps help the number of people who like it grow, you see.

JRN: アメリカ人がもっと納豆に親しめるレシピ等の提案はありますか？

Sone: アメリカ人はネバネバした食感が苦手な人が多いので、火を通してあげると食べやすくなるのではないのでしょうか。たとえばパンケーキの中に入れるとか、乾燥海苔に巻くなどして工夫をすればもっと好きな人が増えるかもしれませんね。

Interview ② : Eric Gower, Japanese cuisine book author

インタビュー② : Eric Gower 日本食料理本著者

While living in Japan for 16 years, Eric Gower indulged his tremendous interest in traditional Japanese home cooking. In Japan, he published two cookbooks featuring American style cuisine using Japanese ingredients, and then in the United States, “The Breakaway Japanese Kitchen.” Now based in San Francisco, he actively conducts various events like cooking demonstrations and workshops.

JRN: Having an interest in Japanese home cooking, it seems that in 1992 you published a cookbook. What was contained in that book?

Gower: I like to use everyday Japanese ingredients like *umeboshi* (pickled plums), miso, *matcha* (powdered green tea) and shiitake in new ways. For example, slathering a chicken with miso and *mikan* (mandarin orange) and roasting it, or cooking duck with *umeboshi* to offset the fat draw out the deliciousness. These are not radical ideas, but they would not occur to many Japanese because they're sort of unorthodox. But the book was very well received among Japanese and Americans.

JRN: During your daily life in Japan, you liked traditional Japanese food, and I heard that one of those things was also *natto*, but in what ways did you eat it?

Gower: I think that I am representative of the Americans who like *natto*. The first time that I ate it, I did not like it, but after eating it a number of times, a grew to like it. That is a funny thing, you know. That is a funny thing, you know. Like many Japanese people, I like it with hot rice. I was attracted to its high

nutritional values. I felt that it was giving me energy.

JRN: You are skillful at cooking using Japanese ingredients, so do you have any ideas for preparation methods that would be attractive to Americans?

Gower: It might take a while to for Americans to get used to eating *natto* at home. They might like it as a croquette, I think: simply dust some with seasoned bread crumbs to form a patty, and deep fry it. Or maybe as part of a matcha soba dish; just add *natto* to some common vegetables and saute, followed by some cooked matcha soba. Lots of umami!

I'm glad that I can now get fresh, local, organic *natto*. Don't give up on it: it will grow on you!

日本で16年間生活をしたエリックさんは、日本の伝統的な家庭料理に大変興味を持ち、日本食材を使いアメリカの要素を取り入れた料理本を日本で1冊、そして米国では「The Breakaway Japanese Kitchen」など2冊を出版し、サンフランシスコを中心にジャパニーズクッキング、ワークショップ等の各種イベントも積極的に行っている。

JRN: 2001年に「エリックさんの台所」(Eric's Kitchen)を出版されたそうですが、どんな内容ですか？

Gower: 梅干、味噌、抹茶、椎茸などの日常の食材を使い、僕が発見した組み合わせで少しアメリカンな要素を盛り込んだ内容です。たとえば、味噌とみかんをチキンに塗りグリルしたり、梅干を使い、脂肪といっしょに旨味を引き出したりと、日本人があまり思いつかない内容で反響を頂きました。

JRN: 日本での生活では、伝統的な食事が好きで、納豆もその一つとお聞きしたのですが、どのように食べていたのですか？

Gower: 私は納豆が好きでアメリカ人を代表する一人だと思います。最初食べたときは、嫌いだったのですが、何度か食べているうちに好きになりました。不思議なものです。日本人のように朝食にご飯と食べました。栄養価が高いので、元気になる気がしました。

JRN: 日本食材を使うクッキングを得意とされるエリックさんから、アメリカ人に受け入れられる調理法のアイデアなどありますか？

Gower: アメリカ人が家庭で納豆を食べるようになるには、少し時間がかかるか

もしれませんが、コロケのようにパン粉をつけてあげるとアメリカ人は好きかもしれませんね。あと野菜と炒めたりして抹茶そばとあわせるとかすると、うまみが沢山ありそうですね。カリフォルニアで新鮮なオーガニック納豆が手に入ると聞いて嬉しいです。うまくビジネスが成長するのを祈ってます。



Eric Gower

Eric Gower graduated from UC Berkeley with a degree in modern Japanese literature. While living in Japan for 16 years, he studied Japanese cooking. He is currently a writer, cooking teacher and private chef. He is the author of three cookbooks: The Breakaway Cook (Morrow), The Breakaway Japanese Kitchen (Kodansha International) and Eric's Kitchen (Kadokawa Shoten, in Japanese).

For more information: www.breakawaycook.com