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## ASIA MAJOR

*The options for Asian food have never been so good in Chicago. From the pioneers to the newbies, here's the lowdown on the most divine Eastern eats in town.*

BY J.P. ANDERSON PHOTOGRAPHY BY BUDE HELM

No cuisine has impacted Chicago restaurants in the past several years like sushi. Blame it on Kamehachi (1400 N. Wells St., 312.664.3663), which has been packing in the crowds since way back in 1967 and whose blend of alluring atmosphere and pristine nigiri kick-started Chicago's sushi craving—and paved the way for others to push the envelope. Today, few are pushing it further than executive chef Macku Chan and his brothers Kaze and Hari, at Kaze (2032 W. Roscoe St., 773.327.4860), a minimalist Roscoe Village storefront that's blowing minds and taste buds with seasonal nigiri topped with everything from fresh ginger and chives to banana peppers and Japanese black pepper. Sacrilege? No way, argues managing partner Andre Williams. "The toppings actually take it to another level of enhancing the flavor and texture of the fish," he says. One bite of buttery blue fin akami tuna topped with an eye-opening combo of stir-fried shiitake mushrooms and black pepper sauce has me convinced, too. Kaze's menu changes with the seasons; to get the absolute freshest fish, the soft-spoken Chan—who was also the opening chef at both Mirai and Heat—has developed working relationships with a dozen fishermen all over the world, from Australia and Africa to Mexico and the U.S., who reserve their haul especially for him. It's little surprise, then, that even avant-garde chef of the moment and big-time sushi fan Homaro Cantu of Moto gushes, "The guy's brilliant."

