

FOODIE JOURNAL

Culinary News & Notes

BY: Kate Parham Kordsmeier

MY BUCKHEAD:
ROBBY KUKLERCO-FOUNDER OF ATLANTA'S FIFTH
GROUP RESTAURANTS SHARES
HIS FAVORITE SPOTS IN BUCKHEAD

For our second installment of this series, we called in restaurateur Robby Kukler, who is expanding his Fifth Group Restaurants empire to Buckhead this month with the opening of South City Kitchen's third location at the front of Capital City Plaza. Here is Kukler's guide to Buckhead eats:

■ When I'm craving a quick, cheap bite to eat, I go for the cold sesame noodles at Grand China. I usually eat them in my car out of a to-go box—it's the best in the city and it's \$5.

■ Time to celebrate—I'm headed to St. Cecilia.

■ My go-to coffee shop is Highland Bakery, and for early morning breakfast meetings, I'm at White House.

■ When I've got no time to cook or go out, I pick up Roaster's to take home, a throwback to when I used to live on Lenox Road.

■ When it comes to grocery stores, you can never go wrong with Whole Foods, and I love Peachtree Road Farmers Market. I especially like the annual ice cream social they have every summer.

■ For happy hour, you'll find me at Bistro Niko for Champagne and oysters. Taking it home? I like all the interesting finds at H&F Bottle Shop.

■ When I'm in the mood for ethnic food, I go to Taka for both sushi and izakaya.

■ For a night out on the town, I'm [usually] at the St. Regis Bar. I love everything about the St. Regis, including their bar—I'd like to live there.

SUSHI SMACKDOWN

HOW THREE OF ATLANTA'S TOP
SUSHI RESTAURANTS STACK UP

Atlanta is home to dozens of sushi restaurants, and our community claims three of the city's best—Tomo, Umi and Sushi House Hayakawa. While you won't find overstuffed fusion rolls here, you will discover premium varieties of fish that wouldn't be out of place in Michelin-starred sushi bars in Tokyo.

Naturally, each has its own reputation—Umi is both extraordinary and extraordinarily pricey, Tomo is Atlanta's answer to Nobu, and Hayakawa is an authentic hidden gem—but how much of the scuttlebutt is really true? To find out, I dined

several times at all three spots, comparing every detail down to the sake list and sushi shipments.

But before we face off, there's one important similarity to note: the best seat in the house at all three restaurants is at the sushi bar, where you can interact with the chef and enjoy sushi at its peak freshness. Sushi is a very time-sensitive food, and the difference in waiting just a few minutes for it to be delivered to your table is palpable, say the chefs (and my taste buds).

Now, for the showdown: 

NOW OPEN CHECK OUT THREE GREAT
NEW BUCKHEAD RESTAURANTS

Photo: Adam Davila

▲ Mustard-heavy pulled pork cubanitos are not to be missed at The Blind Pig.

THE BLIND PIG
PARLOUR BAR

In keeping with the nation's penchant for secret-door speakeasies, Southern Proper Hospitality opened The Blind Pig Parlour Bar, a Gatsby-esque watering hole behind Smokebelly serving up what may be the best craft cocktails in town. Their twist on the classic Negroni is not to be missed, nor are the amazing small plates, like mustard-heavy pulled pork cubanitos and smoked beef carpaccio with crispy capers and truffle salt.

DORAKU SUSHI

At long last, Kevin Aoki, son of Benihana founder Rocky



▲ Don't miss the tuna tacos with avocado cream at Doraku.

Aoki, has opened his sixth location of Doraku (you'll find the others in Miami, Oahu and Vietnam). Evocative of Japanese izakayas (the giant sake barrels lining the walls are an iconic touch), Doraku shines with their small plates, like tuna tacos with avocado cream.

BUCKHEAD TAVERN

Aoki's not the only son in town following in his father's footsteps—Johnny Esposito, Jr. (his father founded the legendary Johnny's Hideaway, celebrating its 36th anniversary this year) has set up shop a stone's throw from Buckhead Atlanta. His casual space, Buckhead Tavern, may be carefree,



Photos: Heidi Geldhauser

▲ Beef sliders with housemade bourbon-bacon jam shine on H&F Bread buns at Buckhead Tavern.

but the elevated pub fare (think sliders with housemade bourbon-bacon jam on H&F Bread buns and mussels in an addictive white wine broth) is anything but ordinary.

The Blind Pig Parlour Bar
128 E. Andrews Drive N.W.
Atlanta 30305
404.931.2169
theblindpigparlourbar.com

Buckhead Tavern
264 Pharr Road N.E.
Atlanta 30305
404.917.2620
buckhead.delphinc.com

Doraku Sushi
267 East Paces Ferry Road N.E.
Atlanta 30305
404.842.0005
dorakusushi.com



TOMO

UMI

SUSHI HOUSE HAYAKAWA

Executive chef	Osaka-born chef/owner Tomohiro Naito	Tokyo-born chef/co-owner Fuyuhiko Ito and Tokyo-born pastry chef Lisa Ito	Sapporo-born chef/owner Atsushi ("Art") Hayakawa
Open since	October 2011	May 2013	February 2008
How often does fresh fish arrive, and where is it from?	All fish are flown in from Japan's Tsukiji Market twice a week, but Tomo receives shipments every day from other cold-water locations, like Scotland, Scandinavia and Croatia.	Shipments from Japan are flown in twice a week, but Umi receives shipments every day from around the world, like tuna from South America, flounder, scallops and sea urchin from the U.S. and salmon from Scotland.	Shipments arrive 2 to 4 days a week from around the world, including Japan, Hawaii, California, Canada, Norway, Alaska and Taiwan.
Overall style of food	Japanese ingredients coningle with Western cooking techniques here (the kampachi serrano dish exemplifies this Nobu-inspired style). Though the rolls are fairly basic, there are many fusion dishes with subtle pops of flavor and a great selection of cooked-meat dishes.	While the sushi is seriously traditional here, the specialty nigiri, appetizers and hot dishes lean toward modern Japanese fusion (Umi also does a yellowtail jalapeño dish inspired by Nobu). The rolls are a bit more innovative, and the sauces are all made in-house, resulting in bold flavors that pack a punch.	You won't find fusion dishes here—from the sushi to the appetizers and entrees, this is probably the most authentic Japanese food. Just see the fried octopus balls (takoyaki) bursting with bonito flakes for proof.
Sushi style	Chef Naito slices his fish the thinnest and uses less rice, which is served much warmer in temperature and is a well-balanced blend of sweetness and vinegar. Proponents of warm rice appreciate the contrast it provides to the cold fish.	Chef Ito's sushi falls somewhere in the middle—his fish-to-rice ratio allows the fish to really shine, as his slices drape over his torpedo-shaped rice, which is a bit more vinegar heavy, and served just above body temperature. Proponents of this style love the freshness and tang it provides.	Chef Hayakawa slices his fish the thickest and uses the most rice, which is slightly warm and a bit sweeter, in his nigiri, resulting in sushi that often requires two bites. Proponents of this style often appreciate how much fish is provided, while critics find it cumbersome.
Ambiance and service	Floor-to-ceiling windows make for a very bright dining experience, which is lovely during the day, but can be a bit overpowering during dinner. Those seeking a quiet, intimate meal may prefer this setting, a beautiful, sleek and modern space that also offers outdoor seating. The staff is knowledgeable and friendly, eager to please.	Umi's bustling dining room is jam-packed nearly every night of the week, ensuring a fun, lively night out. The natural wood, dim lighting and beautiful people make for a glamorous experience that's often shared with A-list celebs. Working their way through the crowds, the servers are attentive, helpful and quick.	The old-school, traditional dining room makes this the most casual of the three restaurants, but due to its small size, there's usually a line of people waiting for a table. Service here is incredibly slow, and you'll likely have to physically flag down a server whenever you need something. However, once they arrive, the hospitality is undeniable.
Number of sakes on the drink list	39	26	14
Number of seats in the restaurant	96 (plus 18 on the patio)	110 (plus 25 in the lounge)	40, including 11 at the sushi bar
Average number of covers per night	125	175	100
Extra perks	Tuna-cutting demonstrations are held once a month, and the cocktail menu and desserts (made by Tomo's wife, Kimiko) are impressive. Tomo is the only spot open for lunch service.	Umi offers creature comforts not often found in sushi restaurants, like craft coffee service, an award-winning cocktail bar and an on-site pastry chef creating unique desserts daily.	There aren't many modern conveniences here, but you will find a special fresh wasabi paste that adds a delicious burst of flavor to your meal.
Contact information	3630 Peachtree Road, Suite 140, Atlanta 30326 404.835.2708 tomorestaurant.com	3050 Peachtree Road N.W., Atlanta 30305 404.841.0040 umiatlanta.com	5979 Buford Highway, Suite A-10, Atlanta 30340 770.986.0010 atlantasushibar.com

Sushi Photos: Angie Mosier



You can't truly compare these restaurants without factoring in price.

Take a look at these four orders to see who is really Buckhead's most expensive sushi restaurant:

	PRICE AT TOMO	PRICE AT UMI	PRICE AT SUSHI HOUSE HAYAKAWA
A la carte nigiri: tuna, salmon, yellowtail, otoro (fattiest tuna), shima-aji (striped jack), madai (red snapper) and Japanese mackerel	\$71	\$82.50	\$84
Prix-fixe platters: the chef's choice combination platters of nigiri and sashimi	\$34 for six nigiri, 12 sashimi and a spicy tuna roll (roughly \$1.88 per piece, plus the roll)	\$50 for eight nigiri and nine sashimi (roughly \$2.94 per piece)	\$70 for 10 nigiri, and 12 sashimi (roughly \$3.18 per piece)
Omakase menu (chef's choice): usually includes a combination of appetizers, sashimi, hot dishes, nigiri and dessert	\$100 to \$150 per person	\$75 to \$150 per person	\$125 and up per person
Average cost of dinner for two people (according to the restaurant)	\$100	\$300	\$100