

Dine / Miki Sushi & Sake



Left: Miki Sushi & Sake (left), is the new iteration of 242 Cafe Fusion Sushi, which closed after chef-owner Miki Izumisawa passed away. The new eatery keeps her memory alive with the same staff and menu as before. Top: Some of the dishes include (from left) Tuna Crispy nigiri; salmon serrano nigiri (front) and eel truffle nigiri (back); Whole Hole sashimi (front) and Laguna Canyon roll (back).

Leaving a Legacy

TWO LAGUNANS HONOR A BELOVED LOCAL CHEF, KEEPING HER MEMORY ALIVE WITH THE REOPENING OF HER SUSHI RESTAURANT.

By ASHLEY RYAN

A little over two years ago, Laguna Beach mourned a local icon when Miki Izumisawa lost her battle with cancer. The 242 Cafe Fusion Sushi owner trained under the renowned Nobu Matsuhisa in Las Vegas—despite the fact that Japanese customs have typically deemed women unsuitable for sushi-making—before coming to town and opening her unique restaurant in 2000.

After her passing, Izumisawa's all-female staff kept the restaurant running for almost a year until it closed in May 2023. A few months later, locals Chris

Olsen (who also owns Wine Gallery) and Greg Washer purchased it from the trust, renovated the space, then reopened with a new name—Miki Sushi & Sake—in July of this year.

Although the restaurant's name and intimate interior have been updated, not much else has changed. Izumisawa's staff, who are more like family than colleagues, have returned and Olsen has ensured that the same menu is offered, showcasing the artful plates that Izumisawa herself so lovingly prepared. Inspired by nature and emotion, these vibrant dishes are just as

delicious as they are beautiful.

While you'll still find a few traditional offerings here, the menu fully embraces the eccentricity of fusion fare. Grab some Pop Pop (or edamame) with house-made soy onion garlic sauce to start or enjoy two distinct varieties of miso soup that are also offered: tomato or sweet shrimp.

Savor the appetizers as you settle on which types of sushi to order. For something simple yet creative, sample some of the fusion nigiri. The Tuna Crispy layers deep red tuna, creamy avocado and purple cabbage with ginger atop koji, or fermented rice; it's finished with ponzu sauce. Other stand-out options include the salmon serrano, which is topped with serrano pepper plus tosaizu and miso sauces, or the eel truffle, which combines porcini mushroom, white truffle and green peppercorn.

When it comes to sashimi, try the Whole Hole, presenting salmon, tuna and snapper carpaccios topped with rare ingredients like lotus root and buckwheat shiso as well as scallion and lemon juice for a fresh twist. Fusion rolls are available as well, with captivating names like Feather in the Sky, Sweet Butterfly, Queen Lobster, Cherry Blossoms and Spicy Jewelry. But one of the continued favorites is, to no surprise, the Laguna Canyon. Resembling a salad more than sushi at first glance, the roll is crafted with tuna, salmon, yellowtail, white fish, crab, masago (capelin fish eggs), cucumber and avocado then topped with Sriracha, ponzu sauce and a hearty helping of greens. Rotating specials and vegetarian offerings are available as well.

Pair your sushi with a crisp white wine, like the Duckhorn chardonnay from Napa Valley or the Henri Bourgeois Sancerre, or a cold sake, such as the Kikusui Junmai Ginjo, which smoothly complements any dish.

Possibly the best part of the reimagined Miki Sushi & Sake is the portrait of Izumisawa that hangs by the door, watching over her beloved restaurant as her legacy lives on. ■

MIKI SUSHI & SAKE

242 N. Coast Highway
949-494-2444; [instagram.com/miki_sushi_sake](https://www.instagram.com/miki_sushi_sake)

HOURS: 4:30-9 p.m. Tuesday through Thursday; 4:30-10 p.m. Friday and Saturday