



Masaharu Morimoto

# The art of simplicity

TV star and restaurateur Masaharu Morimoto brings *Iron Chef* inventiveness to minimalist Japanese fusion cuisine

There's a statement buried deep within Masaharu Morimoto's stunning new cookbook, *Morimoto: The New Art of Japanese Cooking*, that reveals a lot about the Iron Chef. "Everything that would detract from my food," he writes, "has been omitted, edited out." The careful paring away of extraneous matter distinguishes both Masaharu's minimalist food presentation style and his guiding culinary principle. It also describes the way he has approached his extraordinary career, cutting back obstacles to move from a troubled childhood in Hiroshima to the peaks of the television and restaurant worlds.

Masaharu, 52, grew up in Hiroshima, Japan. In a recent conversation with *Hello! Canada*, he traced his lifelong ambition to a rather bleak childhood. "My family was kind of... black," he says, pausing to search for the right word to describe life with a hard-drinking father. The family was often short of money, but every three or four months, they would go to a sushi restaurant.

## INGREDIENTS serves 4

3 tbsp	unsalted butter
1	shallot, minced
1	garlic clove, minced
¾ lb	mixed fresh mushrooms (matsutake, shiitake, oyster, enoki or any other), diced
1 cup	steamed white rice
2 tbsp	dry white wine
2 tbsp	Madras curry powder
	salt and freshly ground black pepper
1	Belgian endive, separated into leaves
2 tbsp	minced chives, for garnish

1 In a large sauté pan or skillet, melt the butter over medium-high heat. Add the shallot, garlic and mushrooms, and sauté until the mushrooms begin to soften, 2 to 3 minutes.

2 Stir in the steamed rice and continue cooking for 2 minutes over medium heat. Add the white wine, then stir in the curry powder. Toss well. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

3 Arrange the endive leaves on 4 plates. Spoon the mushroom salad onto the leaves. Garnish with chives.



Curried mushroom salad

## Oyster foie gras



### INGREDIENTS serves 4

<b>2 tbsp</b>	each sake and soy sauce
<b>2 tbsp</b>	mirin
<b>2 tbsp</b>	sugar
<b>1½ tsp</b>	cornstarch
<b>6 oz</b>	fresh foie gras, cut into ½- to ¾-inch-thick pieces
	freshly ground black pepper
<b>12 pieces</b>	(about 4 oz) uni [or sea urchin, available from specialty shops]
<b>4</b>	Pacific jumbo oysters, freshly shucked
<b>4 sprigs</b>	fresh chervil or parsley, for garnish

**1** In a small bowl, make a teriyaki sauce by combining the sake, soy sauce, mirin and sugar. In another small bowl, dissolve the cornstarch in

2 tbsp of water.

**2** Heat a small dry, heavy skillet over high heat until very hot. Cut the foie gras into 4 pieces, season with pepper and add to the hot pan. Sear quickly on both sides until browned outside and warmed through, but still rare, 60 seconds on each side. Remove to a plate.

**3** Reduce the heat to medium. Pour the teriyaki sauce into the skillet and scrape up the brown bits from the bottom of the pan. Add the dissolved cornstarch and stir until thickened and smooth. Immediately remove from heat.

**4** In a steamer over boiling water, place 3 pieces of uni on top of each oyster and steam for 3 minutes, until just cooked.

**5** Transfer the uni-oysters to 4 plates and top each with a slice of foie gras. Drizzle the thickened teriyaki sauce over the oysters and foie gras. Garnish each with a sprig of chervil. Serve immediately.

He summons up the vivid memories: “Mother smiling, father drinking sake with us and sister eating sushi. I was so happy with this.” His pleasure extended to watching the sushi chefs with their starched white uniforms and precise movements of knife against fish. “Since then, I’ve been keeping the dream in my heart of being a sushi chef,” says Masaharu, bringing his fist to his heart with a striking gesture. “And finally, I did it.”

Of course, to define Masaharu as a sushi chef would be to take a rather minimalist perspective. Certainly, he has few rivals in that area – signature dishes like toro tartare served with a vibrant lineup of sweet, crunchy, hot and creamy condiments would alone ensure his fame. But there is much more to the man. As the Iron Chef since 1998, his conquering exploits in the Kitchen Stadium have brought him fame and fortune. He is the proprietor of restaurants in cities from New York to Mumbai, and has his own lines of knives and beer. But more than this, he is an innovator in the ▶

# Red miso soufflé



**INGREDIENTS** serves 4

2 tsp	unsalted butter
½ cup	red miso
1¼ cups	sugar
6	whole eggs, separated
6	egg whites

**1** Preheat the oven to 375° F. Butter 4 (8-oz) ramekins or individual soufflé dishes.

**2** In a large mixing bowl, whisk together the red miso, ¼ cup of the sugar and the 6 egg yolks. Blend well.

**3** In another large mixing bowl, beat the 12 egg whites until frothy. Gradually add the remaining 1 cup of sugar while continuing to beat until soft peaks form. Fold the beaten whites into the red miso base. Divide among the ramekins. Level off the tops with a spatula.

**4** Bake for 8 to 10 minutes, until puffed and just set. Serve immediately.



The lush photographs on nearly every page of Masaharu Morimoto's first cookbook, *Morimoto: The New Art of Japanese Cooking* (DK Publishing), portray food so lovely that it intimidates even as it inspires. However, many of the recipes are straightforward enough for the seasoned home cook – although access to Asian groceries and a good fishmonger are essential for would-be kitchen samurais.

world of Japanese cuisine – inspired, but never bound, by tradition. A typical Masaharu dish might pair raw fish with an Italian clam and mussel broth; he'll use Indian spices to marinate chicken, or top a teriyaki-sauced oyster with a rich slab of foie gras. Never gimmicky, his choices are based on his unerring culinary sense of which ingredients and textures will complement each other the most.

Masaharu's unorthodox approach has its roots in his non-traditional training. He worked as a sushi chef in a small Hiroshima restaurant for nearly eight years before opening his own coffee shop at the age of 25. "The first year, I smelled of coffee," he recalls. "The second year, I didn't really smell of coffee, more of food, because it was becoming a diner. But then I thought to myself, I am a sushi chef – what am I doing making coffee in a diner?" He started making sushi at night in a restaurant across the street from his diner – one of several additional jobs he took on in those busy years. "I didn't make a lot of money, but I had no time to spend it," he explains. By the time he was 30, he had enough money saved to go to the United States, where the sushi boom was in full swing. Masaharu and his wife, Keiko – together since high school – bought one-year open tickets. "The first stop was New York, and I'm still there," he says.

Masaharu spent his first years in the U.S. toiling in anonymous sushi kitchens, working two jobs, but finding few outlets for his creativity. "I had to have a very strong spirit, like a samurai," he says now, explaining why he ties his kimono in characteristic samurai-style to this day. (One nice touch in his book is a step-by-step series of photos of Morimoto dressing for "battle.") His perseverance paid off: from a hard-won post as sushi chef in Sony's executive dining room, he vaulted to an executive chef position at top New York restaurant Nobu. Producers from the original Japanese version of *Iron Chef* came calling soon afterward. When the Food Network remade the show for North America, Masaharu became one of its four resident Iron Chefs. The boy from Hiroshima soon had restaurants of his own, and now, to crown his achievement, he has a beautiful cookbook to showcase the daring flavours and techniques that made him famous.

Despite his budding empire, Masaharu still thinks of himself as a sushi chef, not a celebrity. "I want to be here," he says, gesturing to the kitchen counters around him. "I am a little popular, and that's enough." In his life, as in his cooking, he believes in editing out excess, leaving behind only what is truly important: the food he creates. **H**