



Chef Tojo brings bento to blossoms

BY LENA ROSS

What is Vancouver best known for? Buckets of rain, beautiful natural abundance, and exceptional sushi are a few things that come to mind. And no one personifies exceptional sushi better than master chef **Hidekazu Tojo**.

Tojo is renowned for creating innovative, imaginative Japanese dishes made from ultra-fresh ingredients that he personally selected that morning.

To celebrate the 6th annual **Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival**, Tojo is partnering with chefs from five other top local sushi restaurants — **Shuraku**, **Zest**, **Miku**, **Zen**, and **Toshi Sushi** — to create the new **SakuraB Bento Box**, a limited-edition culinary treat that's only available on Thursday, April 5.

This is not just any ordinary bento box; it is the definition of "ichiban," which means "very special" in Japanese. This is because the **SakuraB** will delight the palates of quality-seeking, flavour-obsessed Vancouverites for one day only, and top chefs will offer on-site demonstrations between 11 a.m. and noon at the festival launch event, **Cherry Jam Downtown**, inside **Burrard SkyTrain Station**.

In a city as culturally diverse as Vancouver, it's important to sample new and

different cuisine. It fosters a deeper connection to the city, enriches knowledge of other cultures, and builds our exciting local restaurant scene.

And there's no better way to experience cultural variety than at one of Vancouver's fabulous festivals. The **Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival (VCBF)** runs from April 5 to 28, and includes music, dance, Japanese arts, food, haiku, bike tours, blossom viewing and painting en-plein-air workshops.

"Food is an important part of every festival, and is a facet of life in Japan," says Tojo. "People in Japan like to sit under the springtime cherry blossoms and admire their beauty while eating and drinking."

It's the kind of imagery that inspires self-expression; so many beautiful moments can happen under the cherry tree. A fun, seasonal way to capture and express these moments is through haiku.

This year's *Haiku Invitational* will begin accepting submissions from March 1 to June 4. The VCBF welcomes submissions from around the world, and encourages both budding and seasoned poets to honour Vancouver's awe-inspiring cherry trees through the beauty of words.

Writing a haiku after savouring a delicious



Master chef Hidekazu Tojo. SUBMITTED PHOTO

bento might be just the way to express your Vancouver.

Visit vcbf.ca for more information on the **SakuraB** spring Bento Box, the **Haiku Invitational**, and other cheery, cherry-themed events happening throughout the city.

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