

In the Mood for Food?

ZUMA

Editor's Choice: Miami's Best New Restaurant

Words by Vanessa Pascale



Overlooking the Miami River and befittingly situated within the stylish **EPIC Hotel & Residences** downtown, you'll find the area's newest gem—the incomparable Japanese-fare-serving **ZUMA**. Like masterful composers, ZUMA founders, award-winning **Chef Rainer Becker** and the **Waney Family**, struck all the right chords when creating their first-class masterpiece.

A blazing success, not long after its well-received **London** debut in 2002, the award-touting restaurant expanded to **Hong Kong, Istanbul** and **Dubai** to accommodate their long list of followers, which include A-listers **Gwyneth Paltrow, Lady Gaga, Jay-Z, David and Victoria Beckham...** Now, Miami has the pleasure of reveling in ZUMA's unsurpassed cuisine.

"We wanted our first ZUMA in the USA to be located within an energetic, vibrant, multicultural and popular city; that to me is Miami," said Rainer Becker. "Furthermore, the bay restaurant terrace and the river that runs alongside it, make it a perfect location."

The contemporary Japanese izakaya evokes a cool vibe with its chic geometric design (by Tokyo based **Noriyoshi Muramatsu** of **Studio Glitt**) while its warm earth tones and natural woods imported from Indonesia create a zen-like ambiance—the perfect milieu for intimate date nights,

important meetings or an enjoyable repast among family and friends. Their innovative twists to Japanese favorites, fused with their robust flavors, have garnered the attention of locals as well as those on holiday. On an average Tuesday night, ZUMA boasted a filled space with a steady stream of patrons from the time I arrived till I left.

Seated in the center of the restaurant, we relished views of the river and robata grill, where we were able to spy on the chefs while they meticulously created culinary artistry. All of ZUMA's chefs and management were extensively trained in London, where ZUMA originated, before working here. ZUMA features three areas for food preparation including a sushi bar, robata grill, and principal kitchen. Dishes are designed to be shared and are brought to you throughout the course of your meal. This is an excellent way to sample a lot of their impressive dishes—especially ones you might not ordinarily order for yourself.

The **stir-fried soybeans with chili, garlic and ginger** were a refreshingly flavorful spin on the normally steamed and salted edamame. Piquant bursts of seasoning made this appetizer quite irresistible and very addicting. The **grilled scallops with pickled plum, shiso and mentaiko butter** were the freshest and

most succulent scallops I've ever tried. The perfect union of flavors, each bite was blissfully divine. I highly recommend that you try this if you like seafood, and if you don't like seafood, this is sure to make you reconsider. The maki rolls and sashimi we amply sampled were all very delicious and fresh—everything a true sushi enthusiast looks for and appreciates. And the **spicy beef tenderloin with sesame, red chili and sweet soy** was a palate-pleasing, tender cut that was thoroughly enjoyed by the entire table. And save room for their decadent dessert: **special chocolate with vanilla bean ice cream**. It's a chocolate lover's dream. Everything we ate exceeded expectations in taste and was impeccably prepared.

ZUMA also features a diverse selection of sake to complement your meal. If you need help choosing I recommend that you ask their sake connoisseur, who helped us pick out a nice bottle.

I urge you to visit ZUMA. If you're looking to impress a date, clients, or better yet, if the foodie in you is looking to be blown away, *this* is the place to try. One experience here and you'll definitely be back over and over again.

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