

FOR THE EXCLUSIVE USE OF JENHALPINS@gmail.com

From the San Antonio Business Journal:

<https://www.bizjournals.com/sanantonio/print-edition/2013/04/26/chef-michael-sohocki-ladled-up.html>

## Chef Michael Sohocki ladled up Japanese noodle bar

Apr 26, 2013, 5:00am

🔑 SUBSCRIBER CONTENT: CDT

Chef Michael Sohocki has built a solid reputation around transforming simple ingredients into extraordinary dishes. To wit: At Restaurant Gwendolyn, Sohocki kicks up the flavor of his homemade pot pie with fresh, homegrown herbs, vegetables, and succulent rabbit meat.

Now, the Robstown, Texas native is bringing a little bit of Japan to the Alamo City, and — with it — a guarantee that customers never will look at a bowl of Maruchan chicken flavor ramen noodles the same way again.

In early summer, Sohocki and co-owner/general manager Jennifer Wade, a Japanese native, will open Kimura Ramen Shop at the corner of Pecan and St. Mary's streets, in the building that formerly housed downtown's Sandbar Oyster Bar.

"Most people think the Japanese eat sushi all day and that's not true," says Sohocki. "This will be a very authentic execution of Japanese cuisine."

Sohocki is the owner of Restaurant Gwendolyn on 152 E. Pecan St., the building where the former Le Reve was housed on the River Walk.

He spent two years running a cooking school in Osaka, Japan, after graduating from New York's Culinary Institute of America at Hyde Park, and long has had a passion for Asian cuisine.

"Ramen is really a Chinese food but adapted into Japanese culture," explains Sohocki.

Kimura is Wade's mother's and grandmother's surname and means "tree village" in Japanese.

Wade also has a culinary background and has helped Sohocki run the wine pairing at Gwendolyn. She will oversee operations at Kimura.

"It's Japanese street food done right," says Wade. "The meals we serve will also be more affordable, between \$3 to \$32."

### Handmade specialties

Following Sohocki's "made from scratch" cooking philosophy, both the ramen noodles and broths will be handmade. The *pièce de résistance* will be found in a variety of ramen toppings such as braised pork belly, duck breast, vegetarian with dried shiitake mushrooms, soft boiled egg, or a roasted pork shoulder marinated in soy sauce and black sugar.



JIM LOCHHEAD / SAN ANTONIO BUSINESS JOURNAL

Chef Michael Sohocki is bringing a new flavor to San Antonio with his Kimura Ramen Shop.

And ramen won't be the only taste of Japanese culture featured on the menu.

"I wanted to combine this with the 'izakaya' of Japan," says Sohocki. An izakaya is a drinking establishment which also serves food.

Along with a full liquor bar that will include traditional sake (rice wine), Sohocki will serve other small plates such as sushi and sashimi, homemade tofu and edamame (tender soy beans sprinkled with salt).

The restaurant will have a light menu for lunch and a more complex one in the evening.

For the general public, the term ramen noodles typically means the five-for-\$1 grocery store packages — a staple in many college students' diets and even for chefs like Sohocki .

"All of us have had that ramen," he says. "I still enjoy it, although I like to doctor mine up with a little sesame oil, shallots, duck eggs ... you can have a really good meal."

### **Unconventional**

Sohocki's unique approach to preparing food — he uses nothing that requires an electric plug — recently earned him a spot as a semifinalist for Best Chef - Southwest in the prestigious 2013 James Beard Restaurant and Chef Award competition.

Much like the noodles — which are ideal for slim budgets — Sohocki and Wade are being frugal about their new venture.

Although they received some startup capital from a couple of silent partners, they have spent less than \$25,000 to remodel the establishment.

The design includes two large bars made of cedar, a traditional building material in Japan.

"We are re-employing machines from previous restaurants, changing out wiring and thoroughly cleaning them out," he says.

### **Lessons learned**

Since opening the upscale Restaurant Gwendolyn in 2010, Sohocki says, above all, he strives to cultivate sincerity in his staff.

"When you 'put on' hospitality, it stinks, and everyone can smell it," he adds.

He also believes entrepreneurs should avoid traditional lending institutions.

"Don't borrow from a bank. It's much better to have a partner than a banker."

Also, start-up businesses should take on as few recurring monthly costs as possible and be aware of advertising to the wrong audience.

Will locals pass up a bowl of menudo for a little Asian influence?

Sohocki believes palates are craving the diversity.

Another locally renowned chef, Andrew Weissman of Il Sogno Osteria believes San Antonians will embrace the concept.

"We have so many locals who travel the globe," says Weissman, adding that Sohocki may be opening new culinary doors with Kimura Ramen Shop.

"We're at a really exciting point in food culture in San Antonio," says Sohocki, "and becoming a very powerful place in the world."

**Jenny Halpin** is a San Antonio freelance writer.

