

A Glimpse Inside Nobu Downtown

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At Nobu Downtown, a spacious lounge is set in the soaring neoclassical forest of Botticino marble columns. TONY CENICOLA / THE NEW YORK TIMES

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Nobu has come a long way in the nearly 23 years since it opened in TriBeCa: The chef Nobuyuki Matsuhisa's innovative Japanese restaurant has become a global empire with more than 30 branches.

Now, prompted by a rent increase, the flagship is moving to the financial district, which is increasingly drawing marquee chefs. Like a number of other downtown projects, Nobu is being installed in a majestic commercial building, the former headquarters of AT&T. (Its TriBeCa sibling, Nobu Next Door, closed on Saturday.)

Nobu Downtown, scheduled to open next week, is on two levels. A spacious lounge is set in the soaring neoclassical forest of Botticino marble columns in part of the lobby of the building, a landmark that was erected from 1912 to 1922. In the center is a large, circular bar, faced in backlit onyx, serving drinks, bar food and sushi, under black ribbons of wood meant to represent Japanese calligraphy. Upholstery is inspired by weavings from Japan as well as Peru, where Mr. Matsuhisa once lived and worked.

Downstairs, the 152-seat main dining room (about twice the size of the old restaurant and about the size of the dining room at Nobu57 in Midtown) has an undulating ceiling of pale wooden slats. An open kitchen takes up one end, with a sushi bar in front of it. The original Nobu is recalled with walls faced in dark river stones and several angular tree sculptures. Unlike the old place, this one has private dining areas.



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The architect David Rockwell, who designed the original Nobu as well as this newest one and many of the others, said he was excited to work with the same brand over so many years. “You can build continuity,” he said.

Mr. Matsuhisa agreed: “It’s good for me to work with David like this. He understands what I do and what I want.”

The vast dinner menu reprises some of Mr. Matsuhisa’s greatest hits, including the black cod miso and rock shrimp tempura with creamy spicy sauce, listed as Nobu Classics, while new ideas are presented as Nobu Now. They include spicy uni shooters; Wagyu gyoza dumplings; and hearts of palm salad with jalapeño

dressing, one of several dishes inspired by South America. Mr. Matsuhisa is using “dry miso,” dehydrated powdered miso, to season a number of preparations.

But the biggest attention grabber may be that plate of do-it-yourself “downtown style” hand rolls, or temaki, served for two in the lounge and available in the dining room. Temaki is suddenly popular in this country, most notably at the chef Chris Jaeckle’s fast-casual Uma Temakeria in Chelsea and at KazuNori in Los Angeles and Midtown. Mr. Matsuhisa’s version consists of a platter of sushi, vegetable garnishes and condiments, with squares of toasted nori seaweed for wrapping at the table. “That way the nori is fresh and crisp,” Mr. Matsuhisa said.

Mr. Matsuhisa and his partners — who include the actor Robert De Niro and the restaurateur Drew Niepoorent — plan to keep expanding, adding restaurants in California and Washington, D.C., this year, as well as hotels, including a ryokan, a traditional Japanese country inn, in Malibu, Calif.

Nobu Downtown, 195 Broadway (Fulton Street), 212-219-0500, noburestaurants.com. The restaurant is accepting reservations, by phone only, for dinners starting April 6. Lunch service will start between April 10 and 17.