



# ASIAN FLOW

Rowland+Broughton brings thoughtful design to Matsuhisa Denver.

*By Mindy Pantiel // Photography by Brent Moss*

There's something about stepping inside Matsuhisa, Denver's newest sushi hot spot, that makes you want to use your inside voice. Maybe it's the gentle stream of water that falls on a boulder in the Zen garden entry that has an instant calming effect or the restaurant interior cloaked ceiling to floor in reclaimed teak that wraps diners in a kind of wood cocoon. Whatever it is, the thoughtful design by Rowland+Broughton (with offices in Aspen and Denver) makes dining at the Cherry Creek locale the perfect antidote for the stresses of life in the city.

A self-proclaimed food groupie of award-winning chef Nobuyuki "Nobu" Matsuhisa, architect Sarah Broughton, who regularly dines at his eponymous Aspen restaurant, came to the project with a strong understanding of the cuisine. "The backdrop we created had to embody the same elegance and simplicity as Nobu's food," says Broughton, who also knew the success of the dining experience at the busy intersection site rested on turning the focus inward. How to soften the glass corner quickly emerged as a primary design challenge.

For the answer, she turned to the streets of Tokyo. "During a recent trip to Japan, I noticed retailers using these gorgeous screens on their windows," says the architect, who, in turn, devised a custom wood screen system for the restaurant's windows and extended the motif by using the Japanese asanoha (think hemp) leaf as inspiration for the screen pattern. "By day it diffuses the sunlight, and at night the building glows like a lantern."

Regarding his approach to food, Matsuhisa has been quoted as saying, "For me, cooking is about giving my customers little surprises that will help them make discoveries about their own latent tastes." In essence, Broughton has followed suit with layers of details—some more subtle than others—that could take several visits to discover and appreciate. The pillowed jasper stone behind the sushi bar, for example, lightens the teak walls; the sliding partitions feature panel inserts fabricated from the trimmings of prayer paper handmade by Himalayan monks; and the gentle curve of the low wall that embraces the bar banquette allows the room's energy to flow. "It's soft and sensuous and breaks the rigidity of the space," notes Broughton about the shape that repeats at the hostess station.

And similar to the cuisine—a melding of Japanese and Peruvian—the architecture tempers the Asian influence with a Rocky Mountain infusion. The leathered sandalwood sandstone cladding on the back bar wall was quarried from the Western Slope, and a series of angled ceiling planes are meant to invoke our mountains. About the regional nods, Broughton explains, "It was important that this be a place where locals can come in and feel at home. We wanted Denver to know it was a restaurant for them." 98 Steele St., Denver, 303.329.6628, [matsuhisarestaurants.com](http://matsuhisarestaurants.com)



## SUSHI HAVEN

From top left: The sushi bar is a happening spot for conversation and fresh fish; soft curves are repeated throughout the restaurant's interior design.





# 11

**1 LETTER FROM THE EDITOR**

**5 TRENDS** The hottest new housewares and decor take a dark and stormy turn.

**6 REAL ESTATE** This luxurious home, listed with Aspen Snowmass Sotheby's International Realty, is the ultimate mountain getaway for families looking to experience Colorado in all its splendor.

**10 DECOR** Jenn Mendelson, principal at Leap Interior Design in Boulder, highlights home trends, plus favorite showrooms and design aesthetics of Colorado clients.

**11 DESIGN** Calling all sushi lovers: Check out Matsuhisa, Denver's newest sushi hot spot that purposely connects Japanese culture and cuisine.

**12 HOME DESIGN** Eddy Doumas of Worth Interiors has created one of the most innovative and unique penthouses in Vail.

**16 HOME DESIGN** The Blackbird House is a sublime modern work of art and architecture. With insights from the interior designer and architect, learn why, sometimes, the whole package works right off the bat.

**20 PROFILE** Rising star designer Colin Griffith of Colin Griffith Design in Denver, muses on trends after a whirlwind trip to two of the hottest design events in the world—Paris' Maison&Objet and Milan's Salone del Mobile.



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