

# Everything Zen

Chef Nobu's namesake sushi spot gets a tranquil upgrade

By Tara Mastrelli

Photography courtesy of Rowland+Broughton

With Matsuhisa Denver, chef Nobu and the ownership team brought along some particular requirements and site-specific challenges for the third Colorado outpost of his namesake sushi concept. Thankfully, Aspen- and Denver-based design firm Rowland+Broughton was more than up to the task.

The location posed a challenge from the start. How does one create an immersive, almost Zen-like dining experience in a vast 7,800-square-foot space on the corner of a busy intersection?

"The first step was to focus the guest experience internally," says senior designer Jayna Kline. To that end, the team cloaked the windows in a custom-designed wood screen system. (The pattern is inspired by the traditional Japanese Asanoha, or hemp leaf, pattern—perfect for both its Japanese roots and its local spirit.) The pattern is layered to create visual texture and stream filtered light that keeps guests focused inward.

Next, expert space planning was needed. "We really fine-tuned the flow," says Kline. "The street entry and valley entry were completely opposing, with the kitchen cutting through it. We had to create a really open area so guests and servers could occupy the same space without running into each other."

For the FF&E, the design team mixed elements of traditional Japanese design with local and natural materials, and paid particular attention to the acoustics throughout.

A custom-made fountain inspired by Masatoshi Izumi installations greets guests arriving from the valet entrance: a gentle stream of water falls from the ceiling onto a simple and locally found granite boulder nestled inside a Zen garden.

Sustainably sourced teak and bamboo finishes are used on the walls, bar, and millwork, while curved banquettes create soft corners that gently connect the bar and main dining area. The back bar wall is clad in leathered sandalwood sandstone quarried from the Western Slope, and the sloped acoustic ceiling is reminiscent of the Rocky Mountains. Even the sliding partition walls leading to the private dining area bring a peaceful detail: trimmings of prayer paper handmade by Himalayan monks is pressed into the resin of the acrylic panels.

Notes Kline: "Dining here is an experience over several courses. We wanted guests to feel comfortable sitting for a while."



**Left:** At Matsuhisa Denver, an intricate wood screen system filters patterns of light that keep the guests' focus inward.

**Opposite page:** Sustainably sourced teak and bamboo are used throughout, and curved banquettes are a plush addition. At far right, a custom fountain and Zen garden greet guests.



[matsuhisarestaurants.com](http://matsuhisarestaurants.com); [rowlandbroughton.com](http://rowlandbroughton.com)

**Owners**  
Nobu Matsuhisa, Steve Goldberg, Michael Goldberg, Nobuko Kang, and Todd Clark  
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Rowland + Broughton Architecture  
**Contractor**  
Haselden Construction  
**Furnishings**  
Sandler Seating and IndoTeak  
**Upholstery**  
Advance Interior Manufacturers

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