



# Anzu, Hotel Nikko, San Francisco

By Thom Meintel · in Columns, Drink, Food, Hotels



Sitting squat on a full block in the Union Square vicinity, San Francisco's Hotel Nikko will not surprise you as a striking architectural gem, but no matter. As you step inside the towering concrete mass an instant feeling of Zen alters the senses, the sound of water gurgling, a perfect Feng shui touch. Mountains of white marble surround you and climbing a baby escalator past a quartet of plexiglass vitrines showcasing pristine Japanese cultural artifacts (fans and clogs) you head toward an illuminated bubbling Lucite panel up a short flight of stairs. This is Anzu, the hotel's dazzling culinary temple.



Don't think bright Kabuki colors inside this temple. The mood is dark, sleek and sexy with gleaming surfaces, lots of black and white, low hanging black glass chandeliers and matte black tiled walls. A fabulous carpet in full bloom weaves its way throughout enlivening the space especially in the swanky bar and lounge serving serious craft cocktails mixed by a master. And let's not forget those bubbling panels that change colors giving Anzu the feeling of a Jazz age club.



So let your hair down, this is a place to eat and drink out of the box. Decide at once to put yourself hands in the hands of Robert Albright, the restaurant's snazzy manager who is the mastermind behind the audacious beverage program at Anzu. Folks, that means he knows how to make great drinks. And I don't just mean great, I mean the best! Robert's menu of signature cocktails being mixed and poured is big on character and the list of fine super premium artisanal spirits being used is impressive. Add to that his affinity for making fresh herbs of the day key ingredients for food pairing and you have a winning hand for dining.



We began our food foray with a discerning eye on Anzu's sushi and raw bar and a round of Robert's Mescal Sours mixed with Del Maguey Vida and made subtly sweet and light as air with egg whites. They were the perfect opener for the sublime Truffle Hamachi with a Yuzu Vinaigrette and a devilishly spicy Kanpachi Carpaccio with Jalapeno. Who knew that a sour could bring raw fish to life?



Next up was an enchanting round of "Ichiritos" with Angels Envy Bourbon enlivened by muddled fresh strawberries and honey syrup.

These were a daring experiment into Old Fashioned territory but given a hearty kick with black pepper which married nicely with Anzu's specialty Titus Roll, a flight of fancy take on a Spicy Tuna Roll adding salmon and served with tiny bits of Jalapeno and a Ponzu Sauce. We couldn't have been happier, that is until we were served a tiny Cucumber & Jalapeno chilled vodka shot, a nice accompaniment to a Dungeness Crab Dome with a Tarragon Aioli. Considering the liberal use of the well-known Mexican pepper in quite a few dishes, I got the distinct sense that our chef was having a south of the border fling, but done Japanese style, and I don't mean Benihana.



We enjoyed the starters and raw bar so much we decided to stick with small plates especially when another round of drinks showed up. Anzu's "Herbed Cohen" is a wonderful herbal concoction mixed with Hendrick's Gin and a bold Green Jasmine Kabuccha. It's the kind of cocktail that makes a name for itself and if you have no objection to that, at least make sure to try this one if none of the others. Simply put, it showcases Robert Albright's talents behind the bar.

We savored every drop as we finished off with a light as a feather Beef Cheek Ravioli and the Ahi Tuna Spring Rolls with Piquillo Peppers (no surprise, huh?) and a Soy Mustard Dipping Sauce.



The adventurous dishes on Anzu's menu prove that the restaurant is keenly aware of both its Japanese clientele and San Francisco pedigree,

not exactly a simple equation. Executive Chef, Philippe Striffeler has succeeded in doing the impossible; creating a hybrid culinary experience that puts an Asian spin on imaginative international cuisine. And that is just what you expect in San Francisco's culinary wonderland.



\*A nice surprise here is the attractive prices. Almost all the main dishes are under \$30, hard to believe when you see what's being served.

Anzu, at Hotel Nikko  
222 Mason Street  
San Francisco, 94102  
415-394-1111  
[www.hotelnikkosf.com](http://www.hotelnikkosf.com)