



## REVIEW CATHERINE CLEARY

# Ridiculously delicious

Miyazaki Japanese Takeaway serves up the best meal I've ever eaten in Cork city

**T**he lighting is autopsy stark. There's a humming fridge beside me and a small bin at my feet. I'm on a wooden stool eating dinner from a counter so narrow that I have to hold my bowl in one hand to get the food to my face. It's a funny place to find the best meal I've ever eaten in Cork city.

You can smell Miyazaki before you see it. It's a small Japanese takeaway at the bottom of the tumble of houses on the steep hill that is Cork's Evergreen Street. If the smell was a sound it would be a song played on a cello—low resonating heart and belly-pleasing savoury stuff.

I ring up the day before to try and book a seat but they don't do that. If the stools are free you can have one, the friendly woman says. There's usually no big wait.

I'm here with a friend, a regular who shows me some of chef Takashi Miyazaki's exquisite Instagram food photographs. Days later I'm heavy-breathing over a pictured snack in a gleaming blue bowl that presses the desire button so firmly I'm nearly tempted on to the M8 again just to taste it. It's a ying yang circle of white sesame seeds on one side, black on the other with a pea-shoot laid along the dividing line. Curled up on the white side is a blackened mackerel spine coated in cane sugar, crunchy fish candy. Holy mackerel spines Batman.

Unfortunately on a Wednesday night, there's no sashimi. Takashi only uses the freshest fish he can get and that's not available early in the week.

He defrosts some bluefin tuna from last year's catch and dots the pale flat rectangles of fish with extraordinary jewel-like shards of yuzu zest (that magical Japanese citrus fruit), house pickle, and miniature egg tributes in potato and roe. It comes with salmon belly with paper-crispy skin so right the slices are inhaled by the friend before I spot we're down to the last one and swoop.

There's only one problem with this food. It's difficult not to be spotted by the chef in a place this small. We're practically eating in his kitchen. So Takashi comes out for a chat and presents the tuna and another exquisite black bowl of squid cut like pasta, topped with a quail yolk. The bowl has dots of carrot and daikon kimchi and a soupy wasabi that's a world away from the one-note green grouting stuff typically served up. Bedazzled by it all at

## 8.5/10

**Miyazaki Japanese Takeaway**, 1A Evergreen St, Cork, Co Cork. Tel: 021-4312716

**Facilities:** Basic staff toilet, not really for customers at all.

**Food provenance:** None on the menu but ask and you will be told.

**Wheelchair access:** No.

**Music:** Pop.

**Vegetarian options:** Good.

**THE VERDICT:** Some of the best food you'll eat on the island.



the end, I miss the fact that they don't end up on the bill so I'll stick to the dishes I paid for.

Squid and okura tempura are coated in a feathery batter and come with a gleaming bowl of ten dashi, his grandmother's recipe Takashi tells us, and one his mother could never make. It may have skipped a generation but the liquid gleams red-gold like it's made from essence of goldfish. He makes it with kombu seaweed from Japan just boiled briefly and then finished with bonito, those tuna flakes that are dried, smoked and fermented until they end up not so much skin-thin as barely solid flakes like an exfoliation.

Dialling it up into Michelin territory is the mackerel special, fillets of the freshest fish with gleaming skin sitting in a coffee-coloured miso soup. Alongside, there's a wedge of aubergine, sliced so precisely it fans like an exotic sea creature catching food from the swell.

San sai soba is a bowl of meaty noodle soup, with no meat in it. All its umami comes from delicate wild mushrooms, nutty slurpy noodles and a yuzu kombu broth with the kind of depth that only comes from a chef who's got a healthy obsession with deliciousness.

It all comes with an endless supply of

green tea sipped from handleless glazed small cups with dimples in the side. They're only comfortable to drink from once the tea reaches a cooler temperature. It's something that feels quietly deliberate.

In her book *First Bite, How We Learn to Eat*, Bee Wilson touches on Japanese food, explaining how the world's most exquisite and healthy food culture is relatively new, rather than centuries old as we might imagine.

Japanese people learned to love fish combined with the savoury meatiness of seaweed, miso and soy sauce recently in a happy marriage between health and flavour. "In the West, the word 'delicious' is likely to conjure up something laced with sugar, fat and salt," Wilson writes. "Whereas in Japan it signifies a flavour found in mushrooms, grilled fish and light broths."

Takashi is cooking the kind of food that comes with tables, chairs, wine lists and price tags at least twice what he is charging here. It's probably just a matter of time before someone teams this big talent with a big room but, until then, squeeze in, pull up a stool and let the magic begin. Miyazaki is the humble home of ridiculously delicious food.