

A man with glasses and a goatee, wearing a black chef's jacket over a patterned shirt and a light-colored apron, stands in a professional kitchen. He is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. The background shows stainless steel kitchen equipment, including a sink and various containers.

live | work | play

Napa Valley Life

magazine

TEN DOLLARS

FOOD ISSUE

MORIMOTO NAPA
LEADS THE WAY FOR
NAPA RIVERFRONT

GARDEN CHEFS

HOME & GARDEN
TOUR PREVIEWS
VALLEY BARNS

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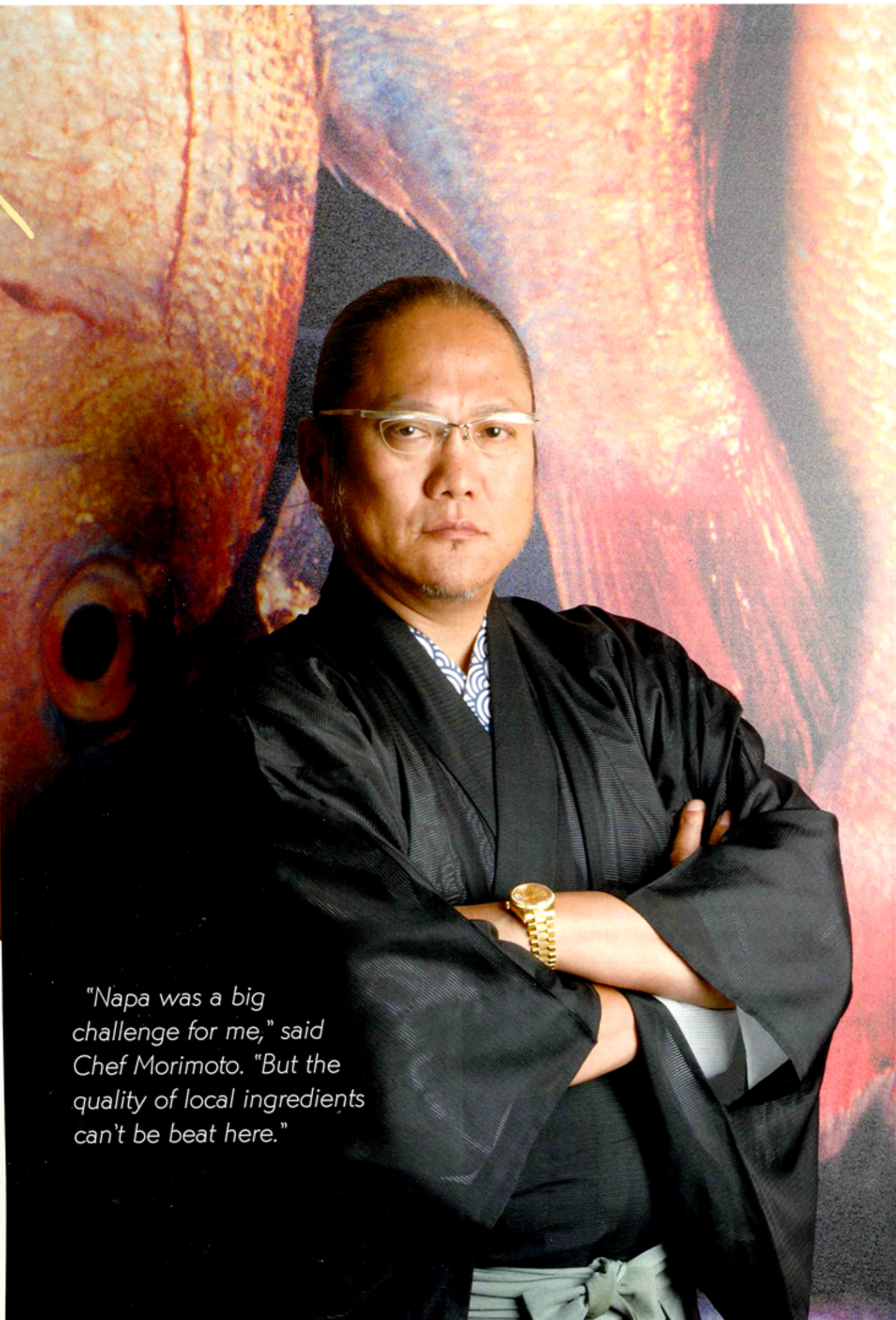
Morimoto Napa

NAPA VALLEY PROFILES

by
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ART AND
CLARITY

"Napa was a big challenge for me," said Chef Morimoto. "But the quality of local ingredients can't be beat here."



Chef Masaharu Morimoto, known to millions as the star of *Iron Chef* and *Iron Chef America* on Food Network, opened his first West Coast restaurant, Morimoto Napa, last month in the new Napa Riverfront development. Located in the heart of downtown, Morimoto Napa showcases the renowned chef's distinctive culinary style, which seamlessly integrates Asian and western ingredients with traditional Japanese techniques.

The new Napa location is number six in a series of distinctive and unique Morimoto restaurants, primarily located in the eastern United States including New York, Philadelphia and Florida. According to Morimoto's Executive Chef, Jeffrey Lunak, Napa was probably one of the hardest and most unexpected places for the Chef to choose to expand.

"Chef wants people to know that he has done extensive research about local products, whether it's meat, fish, or ducks, while embracing and highlighting the community. We're serving over 200 Napa Valley wines, dealing with only California vendors except the Japanese fish," said Lunak. "We chose Napa because this is where some of the best local fresh ingredients and great chefs are."

"Napa was a big challenge for me," said Chef Morimoto. "But the quality of local ingredients can't be beat here. We're doing a lot of our own farming, which is not traditional for a Japanese restaurant. We also have our own Japanese varietal of trees." Chef Morimoto's crew has planted six plots in the community garden and is looking at

the Copia Gardens, until Chef Morimoto can purchase land in the Napa Valley for the restaurant's own garden.

Morimoto Napa offers three components to its location, according to Lunak. "The front side off Main Street will include a market and retail," said Lunak. "Kind of a mini Japanese Dean & DeLuca, with fish and meat from Japan, Asian-style prepared foods, cookbooks, knives and dishware. One stop...and a little of everything."

Walk through the retail area and follow a long corridor adorned with a huge fish mural, pass an open kitchen and you'll enter into a striking open floor plan, which consists of an 80-seat dining room adjacent to a lounge and bar. A private glass dining area can be configured to accommodate up to 70 seats, as well as larger parties for indoor/outdoor receptions. Designer Thomas Schoos seamlessly blends tradition and modernity with a wine-country twist, juxtaposing old fashioned high-backed chairs and beaded couches with the main bar's wood-textured concrete and wrought iron chandeliers. The restaurant's back walls are illuminated by windows that lead guests to the 40-seat patio. Overlooking the Napa River, guests can dine outdoors in the warm California sun or drink and eat under the evening stars.

"We're going to let the diners decide whether or not it's relaxed casual or more fun dining," said Chef Lunak. "You can sit at the bar and get the classic menu or the lounge menu, or sit in the dining room. It's definitely customer-driven."

Two other unique features of the Morimoto restaurants are their own rice polisher and a super freezer at -90° Fahrenheit. "We are the only restaurant in America that uses a rice polisher," said Chef Morimoto. "We take brown rice and polish it ourselves each day. It has a better, sweeter flavor and it doesn't sit in a warehouse in a bag for three or four months."

"Our super freezer allows us to buy certain seasonal fish like whole tuna and break it down and freeze it instantly. It's so cold, it keeps the fish intact at that moment, as if it had never been frozen," added Chef Lunak. These are just a few of the endless secrets that award-winning Chef Morimoto and his staff use to create dishes that are not only a culinary delight, but will be talked about and sought after.

"People will be surprised by some of the dishes, how the restaurant looks and how the service is going to be," said Chef Lunak.

The menu at Morimoto Napa will celebrate local purveyors and the area's renowned agricultural bounty, sourcing most produce and agricultural ingredients within a 40-mile radius of the restaurant. The restaurant's seasonal and ever-changing selection of seafood is drawn from markets around the world, including overnight deliveries directly from Tokyo's famed Tsukiji fish market.

Morimoto Napa will be open for lunch and dinner daily, offering several of the acclaimed Chef's signature dishes as well as a selection of new menu items that have been created especially for the wine country

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restaurant. New appetizers include *Morimoto Bone Marrow*, a 12-14" lateral cut of locally procured bone marrow prepared in the traditional French style and flavored with Morimoto's signature seven-spice mix and teriyaki sauce; *Foie Gras Takoyaki*, a riff on popular Japanese dumplings, made with foie gras instead of octopus; and *Fig Tempura*, fried local black mission figs served with foie gras-infused chunky peanut butter sauce, house-made pomegranate syrup and house-brewed soy sauce.

The menu will also offer a selection of soups and noodles with rich, unctuous house-made broths. *Sea Urchin Carbonara* combines Inaniwa udon noodles topped with fresh sea urchin and a sea urchin sauce, tossed with local smoked bacon, English peas, a quail egg and fresh-cracked black pepper; *Duck Meatball Soup* with juicy meatballs made of ground Liberty Duck and mountain yams in a nuanced duck broth; a refreshing *Frozen Iceberg Wedge*, a unique spin that combines half an iceberg lettuce head that has been frozen for 24 hours with

a topping of creamy blue cheese, hot smoked bacon dressing and pickled local baby bell peppers.

Rounding out the menu are selections of chicken, surf & turf, hearty rice entrees, and Wagyu steaks. Chef Morimoto's *Duck Duck Goose* playfully showcases local duck prepared in five different ways: duck confit fried rice, seared duck breast and leg of confit duck, duck meatball soup, and duck egg cooked sunny-side up, all garnished with fresh gooseberry sauce.

Morimoto Pork Chop & Applesauce is the Chef's take on the American classic, with local pork brined for 24 hours, then marinated in miso for a further 24 hours, served with warm bacon kimchee and ginger apple purée; and *Crispy Whole Fish*, a de-boned whole fish served fried on a bed of spicy tofu sauce, Chinese pickles, and Korean miso with a refreshing salad of pickled green papaya

Morimoto Napa's wine list celebrates the remarkable depth and breadth of Northern California wines, boasting more than 200 selections from local producers. The list includes many unique

and hard-to-find selections chosen to complement the menu's Asian flavors and raw items. Morimoto Napa will feature an extensive sake list with more than 30 labels from around Japan, including Chef Morimoto's proprietary line of premium and aged sake. Local craft and house-brewed draft beer, a selection of imported bottled beers, and the Morimoto line of beers, produced by Rogue Breweries, will also be available. Champagnes, a handcrafted cocktail menu, and full bar complete the beverage program.

A late night menu and the sushi bar will be available from 10:00 pm weekdays and 11:00 pm on weekends. The bar and lounge will be open until midnight Sunday through Thursday, and until 1:00 am on Friday and Saturday.

Born and raised in Hiroshima, Japan, Chef Morimoto learned the art of sushi and traditional Hisek cuisine. After owning a restaurant in Japan for five years, Chef Morimoto said, he wanted to see new places and try new



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—Executive Chef Jeffrey Lunak,
with Morimoto at left

things and explore Western cuisine, so he bought an open-ended ticket to travel around the United States and landed in New York. Chef Morimoto has effectively created his own unique cuisine—one defined by innovation and inspiration by blending Asian and Western flavors. In 2001, he opened Morimoto restaurant in Philadelphia. In 2004, Wasabi by Morimoto opened to great acclaim at the Taj Mahal in Mumbai, followed in 2005 by the Michelin-star rated Morimoto-XEX in Tokyo. In January 2006, Morimoto brought his eponymous restaurant to New York City. Earning the James Beard Foundation Award for Outstanding Restaurant Design, Morimoto New York has garnered numerous awards, including being named by *Condé Nast Traveler* as a 2006 Hot List restaurant; one of New York's Top 50 restaurants by *Travel + Leisure*; Top Newcomer by Zagat Survey; and one of *New York* magazine's Best New Restaurants. Morimoto's first cookbook, *Morimoto: The New Art of Japanese Cooking*, was published by DK in 2007; it was nominated for a James Beard Foundation Book Award and won two IACP awards.

When asked which of his restaurants his favorite is, he replied with a smile, "All my restaurants are like my kids. I have no favorite, I like them all." In a unique tradition with Chef Morimoto, near the end of night, he gathers his crew in a circle and they go over the highlights of the day and end with an inspirational chant. Chef Lunak will continue the ritual when Chef Morimoto is not present.

Morimoto Napa is located in downtown Napa at 610 Main Street, Napa, CA 94559 in the Napa Riverfront development. For reservations, call 707.252.1600 or visit www.morimotonapa.com for more information.