

Iron Chef Masaharu Morimoto arrives in Napa

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Hopper Stone

Duck Duck Goose at Morimoto Napa is a playful medley of duck preparations and frozen foie gras.

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World-renowned Iron Chef Masaharu Morimoto opened his first West Coast outpost on Thursday, bringing his distinct urban flair to downtown Napa.

The modern Japanese restaurant is the first of three big-name projects slated for the Napa Riverfront development, with Lark Creek's Fish Story and Tyler Florence's Rotisserie and Wine due later this year.

Like Morimoto's other restaurants across the globe, the food blends the old with the new. With the help of executive chef Jeffrey Lunak, the sizable dinner menu includes many Morimoto signatures, from the artful take on toro tartare (\$25) to the "duck duck goose" dish (\$36), a playful medley of duck preparations and frozen foie gras.

But the Iron Chef has also created some dishes exclusive to his Wine Country branch, like his Asian interpretation of carbonara (\$18/\$28), made with sea urchin, smoked bacon and udon noodles. For those wanting to go all out with the full Morimoto experience, there's the option for omakase, a chef's choice menu (\$110).

Approximately 40 or so patio seats overlook the serene river, but inside, the vibe is a big city one. Bright yellow chairs, concrete floors and framed grapevines are among the design highlights of the 80-seat main dining room and lounge. There's also a bar area, a sushi bar, and - take note, wedding planners - a private dining room. Eventually, the restaurant will do its own brewing as well.

Morimoto Napa: 610 Main St. (near Fifth Street), Napa; (707) 252-1600 or morimotonapa.com. Dinner nightly; lunch to begin soon. Starters, \$9-\$25; sushi, \$4-\$10; entrees \$23-\$55.