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Interview with Alan Suzuki (Crystal Fish)

Kayla Fon

Cambria Novelly

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Interviewee: Alan Suzuki

Interviewers: Kayla Fon, Cambria Novelly

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Overseen by: Dr. Dustin Wright

Biography: Alan is an immigrant from Japan, He was born and raised in Tokyo, Japan. Alan's professions have consisted of construction, waiter, and now sushi chef. Alan works in the Crystal Fish Sushi restaurant, a restaurant originally started and run by a classmate of his who was also a sushi chef who invited Alan to come work as a sushi chef in his restaurant. He and his classmate both attended university in San Francisco. In addition to this Alan also attended a university while in Japan.

Summary of Transcript:(00:00:00) Alan Suzuki talks about his youth and as a college student. (00:02:37) How long he has been making sushi and what are his favorite types of sushi to make. (00:06:24) Alan discusses what his food was like back home in Japan and how his family taught him to make food. (00:10:06) Alan discusses the difference in ingredients between American and Japanese sushi.

Interview Transcript:

KF 0:00

Okay, if we put it over here. Okay. Awesome. Thank you. So first I'd like to say I'm a super big fan. I love eating here. It's so good and tasty.

CN 0:15

It is so good but I always come in on weekends when it's busy.

AS 0:19

The weekend is so busy.

KF 0:22

Yeah, I'm here often, I live off David. So I get to come here like when I'm on my way home I'll call it in. Yes, so awesome. So some questions that we had were, what inspired you to be a chef? Why not? If you like eating then it's always a good reason.

AS 0:51

When I was a college boy, I used to do a lot of things like construction for the city hall. I think serving tables and cooking sushi also, I used to work with my father. Unfortunately, I had to leave his company. So then it ended up becoming sushi.

KF 1:32

Ah, where are you originally from?

AS 1:35

Tokyo.

CN 1:39

That's cool. What did you go to college for? Originally?

AS 1:43

I went to two schools, one in Japan. And the one in here.

KF 1:52

That's awesome. Where did you go to school here? USA Nice. What brings you to Monterrey?

AS 2:06

How to make a long story short. I used to have my own restaurant too. This restaurant just changed ownership but the person, he was one of my schoolmates. Ah yeah. After I closed my restaurant I was wondering if he needed me so then I came down.

CN 2:37

That's cool. So how long have you been making sushi

AS 2:44

Over 30 years. Yeah.

KF 2:48

So as a sushi master, what's your favorite dish to make?

AS 2:53

Oh good. Yeah, is that our job so anything the customer wants?

KF 2:57

Yeah, of course.

AS 3:03

Japan has its own tradition but then here in American style anything the customer wants.

CN 3:08

What is the difference between sushi in America vs. sushi in Japan?

AS 3:11

This here is Japanese [gestures to sashimi and nigiri]. Yeah, this is all American sushi [gestures to rolls].

KF 3:18

What kind of sushi Do you prefer, American sushi or Japanese?

AS 3:36

Like both.

KF 3:38

What would you say is similar between the two and what would you say is different? What would you say is similar between the different styles like American style versus Japanese style and what's different?

AS 3:50

Well, basically the rice is cooked the same, and then a fish. And we need to ship in, so those are things but they're not mostly here.

KF 4:14

Do you have a favorite sushi meal that you like? What would you say is the hardest dish to make?

AS 4:48

Before I have some skill, also prep. Otherwise, if the customer makes special requests, then it's hard to make it. There are a few steps like that.

CN 4:59

Which one would you say are the worst examples you give?

AS 5:05

Sometimes the customer asks you to make it with no rice. So the seaweed, fish, and some vegetable yeah and the finisher. And most sushi chefs actually, they don't like it. Yeah, they try not to take it. Yeah, but then I noticed already late today just a couple of times the customers you know asked to have no rice. I used the avocado, roll it up with the seaweed and have the avocado on the outside to hold it.

KF 5:55

Yep, some really good strategy.

AS 6:00

Yeah but when it's super busy, which is hard to do.

KF 6:06

What's your favorite dish to make when you're really busy?

AS Gestures to the sashimi

CN 6:12

So sashimi are the easy ones?

KF 6:17

Because those are my favorite to order so I'm glad to know that you like to make those too.

CN 6:24

Do you think there's any food that you make that you like for yourself? Or is it all too Americanized here? Is any of the food that you make more reflective of Japan? Or is it really American food that you're making?

AS 6:41

I can cook pretty much the basic Japanese food. I'm not really trained for kitchen stuff. I used to be like my family, like a kid and the mother and the grand grandmother. They all got together and made some food so I know the basics and it's just fun.

CN 7:08

Yeah

AS 7:11

So the shrimp tempura it's not that difficult. You just need to know how to make it look good like how they got it looks dry and the shadow shape yeah but if they no no it looks like weighted stuff then they look really oily. And it's like a soft yeah and doesn't feel heavy and has a crunchiness.

KF 7:58

I'm getting hungry talking about it right. Do you have any dishes that you make for yourself that remind you of home?

AS 8:09

I like to make a bowl of rice and also pork cutlet.

AS 8:22

Yes. And then also I heard of some restaurants here in the States. They are not using sauce just to dry, they need to make it juicy, supposed to be juicy, but then not even juicy. They don't look good.

KF 8:48

Yeah, I always ask for extra sauce on the side. Yeah, I love it. It's so tasty.

AS 8:55

On another one here, but the San Jose area. There is a bit of a poor restaurant. Like fast food. Yoshinoya makes good bowls.

KF 9:12

It was so tasty. You. I like those ones a lot, too. Yeah. Yeah. They definitely are like, in LA there's a restaurant called Diakurma Ramen and they have really good pork katsu bowls that I love. Yeah. Do you have a favorite restaurant around here that you'd like to go to when you don't feel like cooking?

AS 9:37

I like Japanese food and sushi. So if I want to eat, I just make it myself. And then for something else I like the Crown and Anchor in Monterey. That's nice. It's nothing special. Just hang out and have a drink. It's not that pricey either.

KF 10:06

Yeah, that and as long as you got a good beer and you're with your friends it's always a good time. How would you say that the ingredients here differ from like the ingredients in Japan?

AS 10:23

Well the rolls we don't use the Sriracha in Japan we don't use the spicy mayo. Yeah yeah so that's the most different.

CN 10:47

Do you use different sauces or do you just not use the sauces?

AS 10:52

Just soy sauce. Yeah yeah.

KF 10:59

I read once in an article that there's like a difference in the wasabi. Would you say that there's like a difference in that than in the states versus Japan?

AS 11:10

Usual wasabi here is made with a dried powder and add the water. But then that's what we usually use but then people prefer fresh wasabi, those imported from Japan or while ago somebody else stole the wasabi root from Japan and started growing secretly then started sending it to the states.

KF 11:48

Oh yeah, I didn't know that's crazy.

AS 11:52

I We don't need to import from Japan since it is less expensive so that we can get it fresh.

KF 12:05

Yeah, yeah anything else I think we hit everything. Would you have any words of wisdom that you want to leave us off on?

AS 12:25

Oh no. Once I asked some students I began 16 years ago. Same probably the same project from the school. Yeah. Just talk about the sushi around here in Japan.

CN &KF 13:05

Well, thank you so much for you. Okay, thank you.