



Hiro Sone, Owner

Hiro Sone has come a long way from his beginnings on a premium rice farm in Miyagi, Japan. The cuisine of the three-time nominee and 2003 winner of the James Beard Foundation's "Best Chef of California" subtly pays homage to his Japanese heritage. But years of disciplined training, cooking experience, and global travel have had equal influence over refined and eclectic cooking style.

Hiro developed a respect for ingredients from his family who has been growing premium rice for 18 generations. He recalls, "My mother, who's a great cook of Japanese and Western-style cuisine, took care of the vegetable gardens between rice farming. My grandmother took care of the chickens and cows. I still remember digging potatoes by hand, the rich smell of fresh milk, and helping with the rice harvest each fall. At the end of the day, after everybody had left the rice field, my grandmother would pick up each lost rice grain from the ground in the dark. I learned from her that even a piece of rice should be treated with respect."

Moving from the rice fields into the revered Osaka culinary school École Technique Hôtelière Tsuji in 1977 the 18-year-old applied that same regard and attention to detail to his studies. Under the tutelage of French masters such as Paul Bocuse and Joel Robuchon, he developed a passion and talent for French cooking that propelled him from graduation to French and Italian restaurant kitchens in Tokyo where he worked his way up from dishwasher to sous chef, and five years later into the kitchens of Wolfgang Puck.

In 1983 Hiro was hired to open Spago Tokyo and went to Los Angeles to train for two months at Spago Hollywood. The experience proved pivotal. Amidst the pots and pans he met his future wife and restaurant partner Lissa Doumani and over the next year and a half he got the opportunity to create and oversee the first California cuisine restaurant in Japan.

Inspired by a newfound appreciation for California cuisine, the young chef returned to Spago Hollywood as kitchen manager in 1984 and was promoted to head chef within six

months. By 1988 he and Lissa were dreaming of a restaurant of their own, and found it in Napa Valley. The couple opened Terra to overwhelming acclaim and it remains one of the Valley's top restaurants. Their new restaurant, Ame, brings the signature taste of their wine country restaurant to appreciative San Francisco diners.

Today Hiro's inspiration comes from visiting local farms and ranches and learning their intricacies. From close relationships with local growers and winemakers and a respect for the seasons and their unique offerings, he creates innovative seasonal menus mixed with unexpected flavors from Italy, France, and the Orient—destinations he and Lissa visit during vacations.

Nearly two decades after leaving the Japanese countryside Hiro's cooking honors the greatest culinary influences of his life—his heritage, classic training, and travels. But it's his continued respect for details as minute yet important as a grain of rice that makes each dish beautifully designed with layers of flavors and textures that lend a depth that astounds with every bite.