

Green minded

Mamasake in Squaw Valley makes the environment a priority.

WRITTEN BY SANDRA MACIAS
PHOTOS BY SHEA EVANS

Love that name, Mamasake. It has a certain savory catchiness, and it's a perfect fit for the restaurant that bears it. Owner-chef Elsa Corrigan made up the word long before she opened her eatery — she used “mamasake” as a substitute cuss word. But the nuance changed when she chose it for her Village at Squaw Valley restaurant's name.

“Not only did the word look balanced when written out,” Corrigan says, “but sake is Japanese rice wine (the restaurant offers 15 different types) and *sake* is also the Japanese word for salmon.”

Mamasake offers California cuisine with a playful, creative Asian twist. Imagination runs as deep as the ski slopes: mussels in sake broth, Asian nachos, sushi roll with tuna and mango. Perhaps the wildest creation is Mama's Balls, Corrigan's signature dish. Minced imitation crab, shrimp, tuna, and tofu fill an *inari* tofu pocket, which is tempura fried before being splashed with cilantro oil and Sriracha. On a busy day, the kitchen rolls out 200 of them (they are served in pairs).

SERIOUSLY SUSTAINABLE

But as playful as the kitchen is, Corrigan, a graduate of the California Culinary Academy in San Francisco, is ultra-serious about her food. Meticulously mindful of every product, major to minor, she is a stickler about keeping green. First on her list is seafood: It must be sustainable.

“I try to keep on top of what's most sustainable and also what's from California,” Corrigan says.

Her fish supplier is Kanaloa Seafood, a Santa Barbara-based company that sources, processes, and distributes seafood from fisheries using responsible environmental practices. She does her own research, too, consulting the Monterey Bay Aquarium's Seafood Watch guide, which rates the sustainability of ocean and farmed fish. She also has attended several sustainable fishery conferences in Canada and San Francisco.

And how about the taste of fresh, environmentally correct fish, you ask? To find out, try one of Mamasake's top sellers, the citrus salmon and avocado roll. The salmon melts in your mouth, a luscious sliver of flawless freshness wrapped around a rice

packet of tempura-fried avocado and jicama (a perfectly crunchy ingredient that soaks up surrounding flavors). A paper-thin lime slice tops each individual piece of sushi, adding a clean, citrusy aftertaste. Beautiful in presentation, textures, and taste — no wonder it is a winner with customers.

Another popular roll, “Mama's Basically Insane,” matches its name. Sliced serrano and *togarashi* (Japanese red chili flakes) top a rice roll of albacore tuna, *kanpachi* (amberjack), cucumber, and avocado. Surprisingly, it isn't as fiery as you might fear. The opposing hot-cool ingredients are well balanced, enhancing clean fish flavors.

THE GREEN PATH

Corrigan is no newcomer to the green movement. Since her culinary school days 20 years ago — when Alice Waters and her *Chez Panisse* pioneered local, sustainable products — she has been a believer.

“It was the religion of the culinary school,” says Corrigan, a Slow Food Lake Tahoe member. “I went into this from the beginning.”



Elsa Corrigan, chef/owner of Mamasake in the Village at Squaw Valley, is a passionate advocate of sustainable seafood and eco-friendly food and drink



Clockwise from top left, seared albacore, house-smoked salmon, and beef tataki; hamachi sashimi; citrus salmon and avocado roll; a server delivers a plate of sushi to a customer; cocktails made with freshly pressed juice from The Mill in Truckee



It is an effort to offer local, organic, sustainable products, particularly in her location, Corrigan admits. But here are some ways she's done it:

- Corrigan constructed a “grow room” in her house, with stacked planting trays and growing lights for sunflower and daikon sprouts, which are used to garnish dishes at the restaurant.
- Tahoe Food Hub and Produce Plus provide local and, whenever possible, organic produce. Kale for Mamasake’s delicious Seven Wonders salad (a wonder it is, chock full of good-for-you veggies) is organic and grown in Grass Valley.
- The Mill Juice Shop in Truckee provides cold-pressed juices and teas from Tahoe Teas.
- Other tiny (but important) healthy steps include: pickled ginger that’s sweetened with sugar instead of aspartame; low-sodium soy sauce; meat, seafood, and produce that are sustainable; and meat that is antibiotic and hormone free.

With enduring conviction, ingenuity, and environment-conscious distributors, Corrigan has strived to keep her little corner of the world green. 🍷

Food writer Sandra Macias is sorry she couldn’t sample Mama’s Balls (she’s allergic to shellfish). But she vouches for the delicious sustainable fish — and appreciates Mamasake’s care in offering healthy, green choices.

Mamasake

The Village at Squaw Valley, 1850 Village South Road, Ste. 52, Olympic Valley
 530-584-0110, Mamasake.com
 Open 11:30 a.m. – 9 p.m. Mon. – Thurs.;
 Fri. – Sun. 11:30 until closing. (April, May, and June hours are subject to change.
 Please call to verify.)