



the Mama
of Squaw

Elsa Corrigan



Chef Elsa Corrigan was once a soccer playing kid in the Bay Area with a propensity to curse. “I was always getting yellow carded out of games,” she says. She did not grow out of the habit. Why bother? Getting ejected from kitchens for swearing was of slim concern—we’ve all seen the reality shows. “You get frustrated, you burn yourself, you swear,” says Corrigan. But then she took a job as Executive Sous Chef at an elegant, Italian restaurant in San Francisco’s Nob Hill. One problem. There was a no profanity policy. “No more swearing in the kitchen?” says Corrigan. “I came up with Mamasake.”

Seven years later, Corrigan was ski bumming and working at a Truckee sushi bar when she proposed a Cal-Asian restaurant in a post-modern, glass-and-concrete building with mountain views in what was then the new Village at Squaw. The plan was accepted—but she was stumped when it came to the perfect name. Then she stubbed her toe. “Mamasake!” she blurted. And that was that.

A decade later, Chef Corrigan’s Mamasake restaurant is a lively, unique Squaw space with distinctive culinary creations (try the citrus salmon roll with avocado, sunflower sprouts, yuzu vinaigrette, and black sea salt). Mamasake melds the art of sushi with the forms and ingredients of fresh Italian and California cuisine. Everything goes well with sake, of course. But to many in the Squaw community, the word Mamasake refers to a blue-eyed woman with short hair and a caring, irrepressible spirit who’s committed to serving up to 700 people per day with sustainable seafood, organic produce, and hormone- and antibiotic-free meats. “It’s not a swearword anymore,” says Corrigan. “Now I’m everybody’s mom.” —**Susan Reifer Ryan**

PHOTOGRAPH BY ROBIN O’NEILL