

The Hotel Kabuki's \$31 Million Renovation Pays Off

The newly reimagined bar in the Hotel Kabuki continues the hot streak S.F.'s boutique hotels have been on.

Peter Lawrence Kane / Wed Jan 31st, 2018 5:16pm / [Bar](#) **DINING**



The Bar at Hotel Kabuki. Photo by Aubrie Pick

Airports have edged toward becoming destinations in their own right — security-line hell notwithstanding — for years now. Boutique hotels have made great strides in their own right, but in the end, they're almost always geared toward visitors and foreclosed against much possibility of repeat business. If they have a bar, it's frequently very dark and disconnected from the city.

That's changed a lot lately. It's too early to establish definitively that the era of soulless, deadening hotel bars is behind us, but we are considerably closer now that Japantown's **Hotel Kabuki** has gotten a \$31 million upgrade and fairly astounding makeover. Part of **Joie de Vivre**, this Post Street interior is newly laid out in a way that makes it a very appealing place to eat and drink even if you're not a guest, and it's light years beyond its predecessor, **Izakaya Lounge**. The book- and tchotchke-filled section of the hotel that the bar serves has such loosely defined boundaries that it basically takes over everything (and also, the tchotchkes are "art tchotchkes" like geodes and bird sculptures under bell jars and leather-bound volumes of Proust). It's never out of place to lounge in a surprisingly comfortable piece of modern furniture and eat a garbage pancake while watching the beautiful people pass by.

That pancake, or **okonomiyaki** (\$11), is much prettier than it is trashy, and this garbage person was happy to note it's actually a trio of savory pancakes made with cabbage, potato, bacon, ginger, a kewpie-esque house sauce, plus plenty of bonito flakes, like the contents of a fancy, hungry, tipsy person's fridge thrown all together. Sound substantial? It is. So are the heavily seasoned **french fries** (\$7) served with a spicy mayo, and so are the **soba noodles** (\$14) buried beneath mounds of cucumber, cabbage, sweet peas, shiso, and with a cup of dashi soy dressing. Those three things are enough for two to dine on, in fact. But you should strongly consider throwing in some **karaage chicken**, because thigh meat with soy and ginger is rather lovely.

Still, this is a bar, and the bulk of the brain-power was expended upon making it a place where people without rolling suitcases in tow would want to feel some vivacity over sake or a Japanese whiskey. Head bartender **Stephanie Wheeler's** menu occupies several categories, one of which is not abashed to straight-up call itself "luxury cocktails." At \$23 each, they're pretty alpha-global, but the list of ingredients in the **Tsuchi** (maitake-washed Suntory Toki, lemon, black pepper syrup, shiso, and yuzu liqueur) betrays the creative labor contained within.

There are highballs for \$13, too, including a patently refreshing **Nikka gin-and-tonic** made with dandelion tonic and apple. Flip a page to the "dark, stirred, and breezy" section, which is the real anchor point. The **Montsuki** (Vida mezcal, Corralejo tequila, yellow Chartreuse, Laird's apple brandy, sherry, and angostura, \$14) is as boozy as boozy comes, yet it's surprisingly mellow, like a rock-star guest who makes his own bed and doesn't lob a television through the window yet parties all night.

Getting slightly more formal is the **Hello Amanojaku**, a reference to a demon from Japanese mythology who devours a girl born from a melon. No melon here, although there is melonpan (or tea cookies) on the side, along with a teapot for two that contains plenty of Suntory Toki, Giffard vanilla, a house Chai tea blend, cashew milk, and macadamia almond ogreat. While the hotel's renovation wraps up, springtime promises an outdoor lounge centered around fire pits in a Japanese garden. If it's not ready by the time the cherry blossoms start to fall, it should be in fit shape before the **Soy and Tofu Festival** in June.

The Bar at Hotel Kabuki, 1625 Post St., jdvhotels.com