

OCE DRIVE



Less Is More

CHEF **KEVIN CORY** HAS BUILT A MYSTIQUE WITH HIS EXQUISITE DINING EXPERIENCES AT NAOE. FOR HIS NEXT STEP, HE'S CREATED N BY NAOE. **BY RYAN ROMAN**

Kevin Cory, the soft-spoken chef and owner of Naoe, does not seek out attention. The restaurant has no sign, unless you count the business card taped to the door, and although Naoe moved to its Brickell Key location in April 2012, butcher paper remains in the windows, meant to deter the casual passer-by. But if Cory and his restaurant shy away from the spotlight, why were Ferran Adrià and José Andrés standing here in the middle of the dining room on a Monday afternoon? In town for a few days in September, the two iconic chefs showed up personally to request a reservation the following evening. It's moments like this that indicate Cory has created something special at his eight-seat Naoe and his newly unveiled N by Naoe.

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Chef Kevin Cory at N by Naoe, slicing wild suzuki (Japanese sea bass) sashimi with an Aritsugu knife passed down from his chef uncle Yasushi Naoe, who was a kaiseki chef for over 50 years.

THE EXPERIENCE

Cory's elusiveness—coupled with his meticulous methods and the quality of his cuisine—has created a growing mystique. This year, Naoe is one of only two restaurants in Florida to receive five stars in the *Forbes Travel Guide*, as well as being one of just 37 five-star restaurants in the country (only two of which focus on serving Japanese cuisine). The dining experience is special: small room, minimal staff, and no menu. The meal begins with a bento box of cooked and raw dishes and then proceeds to by-the-piece nigiri sushi, each made by Cory and immediately handed to the diner when the temperature of the rice contrasts perfectly with that of the fish, which might include left-of-center species such as madai (sea bream), shima aji (striped jack), and karasumi (sake-marinated dried mullet roe).

THE NEXT STEP

Cory would have been happy to focus on Naoe, but the lease for his space required that he also open for

lunch. Necessity breeds invention, and N by Naoe, a separate adjacent dining space, opened for lunch in June. N offers a lunch seating at noon and a dinner seating at 6:45 PM, presenting diners at either hour with a six-compartment bento box, a bowl of homemade soup, a rice bowl, and dessert. The bento box will likely contain a fresh fish, often blackbelly rosefish caught off of Haulover Inlet, prepared two ways: the first grilled with an accompanying piece of Key lime, and the second steamed alongside okra in a rich broth. The bento box may also include a dish served at Naoe, such as pork jowl beneath parsnip puree and mustard. Unlike Naoe, which features an open kitchen, N is organized around a communal table.

KNIFE PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

Despite the serenity of both Naoe and N, Cory talks about making sushi as if it were a serious sport. "It's like a competitive athlete; you train to prove yourself for respect," he says, going on to paraphrase a statement by former Champion Mike Tyson: "You have to be

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willing to do something other people aren't willing to do to be better than them." In the restaurant, that means obsessively perfecting his craft through repetition of the same knife stroke through fish, and forming that flawless sphere of rice with his hands at precisely the right temperature.

As a result, everything is just so, as Cory likes it. His devotion to his craft has not gone unnoticed. Chef Andrés tweeted the following night that Naoe was "beyond good," and he implored food writers and others to give Naoe the "statu[r]e and importance it deserves." Chef Cory can put up another layer of butcher paper if he likes, but it's going to be difficult to keep Naoe under the radar much longer. 661 Brickell Key Dr., Miami, 305-947-6263; naoemiami.com **OD**



Bento box including, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT, simmered pork jowl with parsnip mustard puree; sujiko (salmon roe sac) with sea greens, trumpet mushroom, and sake- and mirin-marinated skipjack tuna stomach; a selection of sashimi; and rice. RIGHT, FROM TOP: Cory holding up shinko (baby gizzard shad); brushing shoyu on a piece of shinko nigiri sushi. The red Ohi pottery is very famous in Japan for its unique color.

