

Manhattan Izakaya

At Katana Kitten, Masahiro Urushido brings Tokyo to New York City

An izakaya is essentially a Japanese pub—an informal neighborhood spot to enjoy drinks and snacks. This is what Katana Kitten in Manhattan’s West Village is modeled after. “It’s a fun, casual place with both Japanese and American influences,” says Masahiro Urushido, managing partner and “director of deliciousness” for the bar, which he opened in the summer of 2018 along with Cocktail Kingdom Hospitality Group’s Greg Boehm and James Tune. “We offer simple, delicious, and approachable drinks but we make sure they’re executed perfectly.”

A native of Nagano, Japan, Urushido entered the hospitality industry in the early aughts, working his way up from food runner to bartender at the fine-dining Tokyo restaurant Tableaux. He moved stateside in 2008 to complete his degree in hospitality management at the City University of New York and was quickly recruited to work at Saxon + Parole, where he was mentored by notable bartender Naren Young. Under Urushido’s leadership from 2015-2017, the Saxon + Parole bar team earned the Best American Restaurant Bar award at the 2016 Tales of the Cocktail Spirited Awards. Since moving on to open Katana Kitten in 2018, Urushido has again earned recognition for his talent—the bar won the Best New American Cocktail Bar award at the 2019 Spirited Awards,



Masahiro Urushido creates classic Western cocktails with a distinct Eastern flair at his bar Katana Kitten in New York City.

and in both 2019 and 2020, the bar landed on the World’s 50 Best Bars list.

Katana Kitten’s name playfully juxtaposes katana, the Japanese samurai sword, with the rather less threatening kitten. The bar’s cocktails (\$15-\$18) include Highballs—a style of drink that’s very popular in Japan—and signature cocktails that take Western classics and give them a distinctly Eastern spin with such ingredients as shochu, sake, umeshu, shiso, matcha, and ume plum. Urushido’s Melon-Lime Soda (\$15; recipe below) is from the Highball list. His Meguroni #2 (\$16; recipe below), meanwhile, is a Japanese take on the classic Negroni. “We’re only just over two years old but our vision remains the same,” Urushido says. “We’re a neighborhood

institution that’s globally recognized by our peers, but we pride ourselves on providing a personal touch to each guest.”

Urushido’s next big career move is a cocktail book slated for release in June, “The Japanese Art of the Cocktail,” which he co-authored with journalist Michael Anstendig. The book offers a look at Urushido’s rise to bartending fame, including the genesis of Katana Kitten, plus 80 cocktail recipes from Urushido and other Japanese and American bartenders who all perpetuate Japan’s distinct approach to mixology.



Sally Kral

PHOTO BY (TOP) ALEX KIKIS

Masahiro Urushido’s Recipes



MEGURONI #2

INGREDIENTS:

- ½ ounces Ichiko Saiten shochu;
- ¾ ounce Choya Kokuto umeshu;
- ¾ ounce Caffo Red Bitter liqueur;
- ½ ounce Rutte Old Simon genever;
- Kinome leaf.

RECIPE:

In an ice-filled mixing glass, combine shochu, umeshu, liqueur, and genever. Stir and strain into a rocks glass over a large ice cube. Garnish with a kinome leaf.



MELON-LIME SODA

INGREDIENTS:

- 1 ounce Absolut Lime vodka;
- 1 ounce Midori melon liqueur;
- ½ ounce matcha-lime cordial¹;
- ½ ounce sudachi and lime juice mixture²;
- Soda water;
- Fresh lime leaf.

RECIPE:

In a 12-ounce beer mug filled with an ice spear or Kold-Draft ice cubes, build vodka, liqueur, cordial, juices, and soda. Garnish with a fresh lime leaf.

¹Gently heat 1000 grams water and 1000 grams granulated sugar. Add 6 lime peels and stir until sugar is dissolved. Take off heat and allow to cool, then whisk in 14 grams matcha powder. Strain and bottle.

²Mix together 1 part sudachi juice and 3 parts lime juice.