



Masaharu Morimoto

BY BEKAH WRIGHT

Vegas, cookbook, and intergalactic travel—no, these three “ingredients” aren’t from a Food Network Iron Chef America throw-down. They’re among the topics covered when *Westways* caught up with the Iron Chef himself, Masaharu Morimoto. The renowned chef, who moved to the U.S. from his native Hiroshima, Japan, in 1985, has built an empire based on his signature Japanese fusion cuisine. Since then he’s opened 13 namesake restaurants in places such as New York; Napa, California; Hawai‘i; Mumbai and New Delhi, India; and Mexico City. His most recent venture is a dream project: Morimoto Las Vegas at MGM Grand. Despite the many far-flung locales, Morimoto’s new cookbook, *Mastering the Art of Japanese Home Cooking*, pays homage to Japanese grandmothers. “We don’t often love Grandma’s cooking as a child,” he says. “It’s only when we grow up that we develop a taste and appreciation for it and realize its simplicity and wholesomeness.”

What kinds of memories are you hoping to evoke for diners at Morimoto Las Vegas? Having a restaurant in Las Vegas has always been a goal and dream of mine. I want to express joy and excitement through my dishes. I want Morimoto Las Vegas to be an energetic place where the diners can feel the vibe and energy through the food.

Does each of your restaurants speak to its location in some way? They surely do. The background of each location—culture, history, and tastes in food—is different, so I try to accommodate the needs of that particular place. I also choose the designer accordingly. That being said, my signature dishes are still there, because it is a Morimoto restaurant. Local palates are simply added on top of that.

Your locations are all distinctive. Did you choose them with a particular vision

in mind? I consider myself a mere chef. I appreciate every offer that’s presented to me and would like to give every restaurant a positive consideration, regardless of its location. What’s vital is ensuring the proper resources, personnel, and ingredients are procurable.

Was there a “California experience” you wanted to have the first time you visited the state? I’d imagined Los Angeles to be a gorgeous place: Hollywood, Beverly Hills. Not only did the city turn out to be as gorgeous as I’d hoped, it gave me chances to meet new people. San Francisco, as well, has given me many precious experiences. California never disappoints me.

Is there a destination that’s on your wish list? Space.

What one item do you always pack for your travels? Jogging shoes.



For more Q&A with Masaharu Morimoto, visit AAA.com/conversations.