

# BOOKSHELF

## TASTE of TOKYO

by Hori Yoshimichi; NHS Creative Co., Ltd., Tokyo, 1996, 215 pages, ¥1,400.

The proverbial saying has it that "The proof of the pudding is in the eating." Similarly, the proof of usefulness of a restaurant guide will best be ascertained by placing one's trust in the author and by paying visits to any of his selections. Following personal experience one may agree, or disagree, with the author about the merit of establishments which he included in his selection of recommended addresses. The guide under review gives entire satisfaction!

Some merits of this selection of restaurant articles written over a number of years by Hori Yoshimichi become immediately obvious when leafing through the book's some two hundred pages. Each establishment is introduced in Japanese and in English; each contribution adheres to the form of a short essay; and price range, location, accepted credit cards as well as business hours are given. In his essays the author describes, of course, what each restaurant specializes in, but also includes an index which, at a glance, shows where to find a particular cuisine, whether it is French, Italian, Chinese, or Japanese Western-style. Under the heading "Others" are introduced restaurants serving American, British, Indian and "other-origin" foods.

In the book's introduction, Mr. Hori acknowledges that each person has her or his own taste. But, with his recommending his own food and restaurant choices, he might be opening himself up to criticism as being arrogant—absurd! As with every kind of guidebook, Mr. Hori's book, too, is characterized by the elements of selection and opinion of the author—*de gustibus non est disputandum*.

The collection of essays is aptly titled *TASTE of TOKYO*. One person's opinion, and no claim is made for the book to introduce "the best in town". Mr. Hori simply aims to induce the reader to go out and participate in culinary explorations. In this, he hit a

bull's-eye.

Mr. Hori's guidebook lays to rest the notion that eating out in Tokyo (not at a *tachigui sobaya* but in a "normally refined" environment) invariably costs a lot, or is even extraordinarily expensive. It so happens that the author's selection of eating establishments, especially for French, Italian and "Other" cuisine, includes a number of places where I have been a regular for years and where I can vouch for good quality food being served at reasonable prices by competent chefs and staff, in pleasant surroundings.

There are passages scattered throughout where one wishes to enter into a dialogue with the author. One instance is a debatable statement found in the introduction. The author, upon tasting food in Japan as well as overseas, states "that the foods served in Tokyo are almost better than those I tasted in the countries where those foods originated." Though I noted the adverb "almost" in his sentence, it is, nevertheless, a bit rash. Yes, in the course of the last 25 years, Tokyo's international restaurant scene has developed marvelously in regard to the number of establishments, range of available dishes, and quality. I must add that, quite often, the quality of service encountered in Tokyo restaurants is at least equal to that of similarly priced establishments in the West.

With regard to his choice of and explanation for "the best fried gyoza restaurant", Mr. Hori made me chuckle! In an apodictic manner he declares that this relatively simple dish of Chinese origin is absolutely, unquestionably prepared best in the restaurant he introduces. And, "Self-styled gyoza-lovers who say otherwise have obviously never been (there) and therefore do not know what they are talking about".

Now, it is of course almost an article of faith whether or not fried gyoza are "best" with or without garlic as an ingredient. In keeping with Chinese tradition, this restaurant of Mr. Hori's choice leaves it out and yet serves most satisfactory fried gyoza. I wholeheartedly agree with the author that the eight pieces which constitute one order are not only Sumo in size, they



are most excellent in taste. Considering their quality, size, low price, and the restaurant's location in Ginza, this place is indeed a must.

I was pleased to see two restaurants where I have been a patron for some time included in Mr. Hori's selection. But I would have liked the author to have mentioned that Ristorante La Granata has a branch downtown where the cooking is at least on par with Akasaka's main place, and that Restaurant Le Récamier also operates a catering service—a crew will come to one's home and make sure that entertainment at home is a complete success.

The few, as it were, oddities and omissions do not at all detract from the guide having been written in an entertaining vein, making the reader's mouth water and leading him or her to go out see for himself or herself whether any of the restaurants chosen by Mr. Hori is to the reader's satisfaction. This guide will not fail you. I am grateful to both author and publisher for their having made available such an easy to read and very handy cross-section of attractive restaurants in Tokyo.

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