

Los Angeles Times

RESTAURANTS



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SPENCER WEINER Los Angeles Times

Robata Bar seats only 50, so there are no reservations.

FIRST LOOK

Robata Bar's adventurous fare is not for the chicken-hearted

“BLOODY Mary oyster shooter? Chicken cartilage? You might as well throw up right now!” someone says in the booth behind me at Robata Bar, the latest concept from the creators of Sushi Roku and BOA Steakhouse. Obviously, not much of an adventurous eater. But he perseveres and soon finds something on the one-page menu that appeals. Lamb chops. And chicken wings.

I hope the poor guy realizes that Robata Bar serves *robata yaki* — bamboo skewers of various meats, chicken, seafood and vegetables grilled over a Japanese hardwood fire. Everything is priced by the stick, ranging from

\$2.50 for that chicken cartilage or chicken liver to \$20 for king crab legs.

In the corner, cooks huddle over charcoal, sending up great swaths of smoke, which a powerful hood promptly sucks up. In front of them, the goods on offer are laid out like a sushi bar's fish — the better to appreciate and figure out what you might like to order.

Dodd Mitchell — who also designed Sushi Roku and Kata-na and a slew of other trendy, design-driven venues — gave Robata Bar a lighthearted look with a ceiling entirely covered in silky blond tassels — 5,000 of them — and walls hung with photos of wacky Tokyo street fashion and fire dancers. The bar

is just 1,000 square feet and seats only 50 guests, so there's a no-reservations policy to ensure that no booths or seats at the counter are left languishing.

You can start with sashimi (Sushi Roku, after all, is just next door) or something from the raw bar — like the popcorn shrimp ceviche — then move on to the skewers.

Funny thing — when we tried to order that chicken cartilage (how could we resist?), the manager tells us they've had an unexpected run on it, and, basically, no dice. He suggests the chicken heart instead. Good call: The little nuggets are tender and delicious, grilled over the fiery charcoal. So are the chicken wings. Flaps of shiitake mushrooms are marinated in ponzu before they're grilled. And asparagus comes wrapped up in bacon. That's decent, too. Chicken meatballs are a bit dull, though.

Extras include seaweed salad or edamame. But \$5 for edamame? They've got to be kidding.

Caveats aside, Robata Bar is perfect when you just feel like a

ROBATA BAR

WHERE: 1401 Ocean Ave., Santa Monica

WHEN: Open seven days a week from 5 p.m. to midnight; no reservations

PRICE: Robata yaki, \$2.50 to \$20; raw bar, \$10 to \$13; shooters, \$8 to \$10; extras, \$5 to \$16. Full bar. Valet parking

INFO: (310) 458-4771; www.robatabar.com

small bite. You don't have to spend a lot — a few sticks of this and that will do you. Hoist a beer or a glass of sake, or maybe a ginger litchi mojito, and you're out of there, off to the movies or a stroll on the beach.

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