



entre nous

Our Hidden Gem that Expresses Japan's "Terroir"

Chef Hideki Takayama. Woodwork on the dining room wall represents the Rokko mountain range

Chef Hideki Takayama, a renowned figure in Japanese cuisine, has opened a French restaurant in Kobe's Sannomiya neighborhood. He says, "I want to offer cuisine that goes one step beyond the conventional in a space that expresses my worldview." At this restaurant, he takes on the challenge of expresses Japan's "Terroir." He brought all of his extensive experience to the design of the kitchen, as well as the interior design and tableware. He also revealed his pursuit to realize a kitchen with high workability to allow creative dishes to be efficiently prepared in a small space.

— Fully dedicated to cuisine while expressing his unique worldview

He has twice represented Japan in the Bocuse d'Or International Culinary Competition, often called the "Culinary Olympics," He won a prize in 2015 and 2019, as well as twice won the victory in the Asia-Pacific region. He worked as a chef in Ashiya, Hyogo Prefecture, for 15 years, producing in-flight meals for ANA as well as nursing care meals. In 2022, "Paris 1930 de Hideki Takayama," the Taiwanese restaurant he supervised, was awarded a Michelin star. Backed by his numerous career successes, Chef Hideki Takayama opened Entre Nous (stylized as "entre nous") in October 2022. He relocated his base of operations from the home-based restaurant "Maison de Taka Ashiya" in Ashiya, Hyogo, to Sannomiya, Kobe, opening this restaurant as the owner-chef.

The name of the restaurant was given by three-star chef Régis Marcon, an important influence on Chef Takayama. Chef Takayama explains, "Literally, 'entre nous' means 'between us', but it also means a hidden gem or secret place. I began my culinary career in my 20s, and now in my 40s, I've built up a wide range of experience. My goal is to leverage my lifetime experience to fully dedicate myself to cuisine while expressing my own worldview. We want to create a very special space where people will want to bring their close friends and loved ones."

"Terroir" is a French word that means "land" or "climate." At Entre Nous, Chef Takayama especially had the challenge of expressing the "terroir" of Japan. He also plans to use Japanese ingredients in over 90% of his dishes. He says, "It means that we will not be able to use staple French ingredients like foie gras, truffles, or lamb. I set this number because I wanted to somewhat limit myself and because Japan already has amazing ingredients in each of the four seasons."



The Taiwanese restaurant produced by Chef Takayama has earned a Michelin star, and he is emerging as one of Asia's leading chefs.



"Origami": warm Chartreuse sauce beurre blanc made with four types of shellfish and vegetables

Being able to visit the producing area and see the ingredients with my own eyes enables me to serve customers superior, more freshly prepared ingredients. With the help of the farmers, we can reimagine Japanese food culture and take our cuisine one step beyond the conventional."

The dining room features a U-shaped counter with 16 seats and a private room with 6 seats. "For the restaurant, located in a commercial building, we considered what kind of space we should create to express Japanese 'terroir'. We coordinated beige for the counter seating and a chic walnut for the private rooms, and also enlisted the help of artists we trust," says Chef Takayama. Plasterer Seiichi Eguchi used clay from Awaji Island to render the plaster wall of the dining area. Facing it is a piece of artwork that depicts the Rokko mountain range. It was created by Chef Takayama's brother, who is a woodwork artist. He also revealed that the plates and cutlery were also created by Japanese artists.



6-seater private room. The wood textures help to evoke a relaxed atmosphere.

— The kitchen was designed with minimal movement in mind

Passionate about his cuisine, Chef Takayama developed a strategy to ensure the restaurant's sustainability when he opened Entre Nous.

"We designed a U-shaped counter for the dining area to accommodate COVID-19 conditions," he says. "This allows us to keep nearly 4 meters between customers who are facing each other over the counter. If you want to secure spacious seating for your guests in a rental property, it can be difficult to have enough space in the kitchen. The kitchen in this restaurant is important not only for preparing food for our customers but also for preparing products for online sales and take-out orders. With a five-day workweek, we also didn't want to compromise on having a proper working environment. We paid close attention to kitchen efficiency in order to create a kitchen that saves space while still allowing for high-quality cooking in a limited amount of time."

Chef Takayama credits his competition experience with helping him design a space-saving, easy-to-work-in kitchen. He explains, "In the Bocuse d'Or competition, we need to prepare 30 servings from scratch in a very limited space. We only have five and a half hours to complete work that normally takes eight hours, and they also judge how clean the work is being done. I used my experience working in kitchens that extremely strict rules." The key, he says, is to minimize workflow lines. "Retrieving things is the activity that wastes the most time. So we simulated the entire process, from food prep to cooking, and came up with a layout that would allow us to stay in one spot while cooking, and even if we had to move, it would only be half a step or one step," says Chef Takayama.

The kitchen at Entre Nous is divided into four sections: hot cooking, cold cooking, patisserie, and dishwashing, with equipment arranged to minimize the amount of movement. For example, in the hot cooking area, where heating appliances line the wall, you can simply turn around after cooking the food on the gas range or oven to prep it for serving. "This way, you can finish cooking and serving without walking a single step. The key to gaining storage space in a compact kitchen is to have all the ingredients and utensils you need within easy reach, rather than just making room for them. In this heating area, we have drawers on top of the cold table," says Chef Takayama. A blast chiller is installed under the combi oven. This allows dishes to be rapidly cooled in the same position once the food is cooked.



Dining room features a U-shaped counter with 16 seats



Hot cooking zone. Simply turn around after cooking the food on the gas range or oven to prep it for serving. The counter is outfitted with drawers for easy access to necessary ingredients and utensils.

— "We use equipment to handle labor in order to reduce work time."

In addition to the blast chiller, Entre Nous has proactively introduced advanced heating and cooling equipment such as a combi oven and Vario Series Dual Pan. The blast chiller is mainly used for rapidly cooling online orders, the Vario Series Dual Pan for menu preparation, and the combi oven for general cooking. "Each of these is an essential piece of equipment for me. With the labor shortage at its height, we need to keep working hours at reasonable levels. We cannot simply accept the excuse that 'long working hours are the norm in the restaurant industry'; time-consuming cooking should be delegated to machines. Since both Vario and Combi Ovens have temperature control, high-quality recipes can be replicated in future batches once you store your settings. As for the oven, even the time-consuming cleaning is done automatically," Chef Takayama explains.



A blast chiller is installed under the combi oven. "We can remove the food from the oven and start rapid cooling right away," Chef Takayama says.



Combi Oven and Vario Series Dual Pan

— Fujimak was the key to creating an ideal kitchen

Fujimak helped design and build the kitchen at Entre Nous. Chef Takayama says, "I've enjoyed using Fujimak products in the past, but this time really reminded me how capable they are as a comprehensive kitchen producer."

"I can confidently say that this restaurant's kitchen was only possible because of Fujimak. Including detailed layout specifications and custom-made equipment, I simply had to say 'make this', and they would accommodate all of my requests. Not to mention the amazing performance of the equipment. With a limited budget, some people may think to scrimp on the kitchen, but actually, the kitchen is essential for generating sales and profits for the business.



Patisserie area



The floor is coated with water-resistant FRP paint with grating that is sloped to allow for drainage when cleaning.

A kitchen with only a passable design and built with budget equipment will have a low level of perfection and be stressful to use. From a business perspective, it is impossible to create a kitchen without constraints, but Fujimak creates the best possible kitchen that meets our goals within the constraints."

Despite opening the restaurant without advertising, it is difficult to get reservations and has many repeat customers. Expressing the "terroir of Japan" began in a space that balances Mr. Takayama's passion as a chef with his mission as a business operator. Without a doubt, its significance will continue to expand in the years to come.



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Restaurant name entre nous
 Address La Doll Ray Kobe Sannomiya Bldg 2F, 1-25-6
 Nakayamate-dori, Chuo-ku, Kobe City
 Opened October 2022
 Business hours
 and menu Section 1 : Gastronomic Pursuit
 (seating from 5:30pm to 6:30pm; closes at 9pm)
 *Open for lunch (same menu as dinner) on Saturdays,
 Sundays, and holidays only
 15,000 yen (tax and service not included)
 From 25,000 yen (tax and service not included)
 Section 2 : "Bar à vin" by reservation only
 (9pm to 11:30pm)
 *Open only on Thursdays and Fridays at present
 Website <https://entrenous.jp/>



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