

**o ya!**  
**Meet the couple behind**  
**what may be Boston's best**  
**new restaurant**

By Mat Schaffer  
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**o ya**  
**9 East St.**  
**(Leather District)**  
**Boston**  
**617-654-9900**



Fishing for compliments:  
 o ya's Nancy and Tim Cushman show off  
 one of Tim's creations in their new restaurant.  
 (Staff photo by Mark Garfinkel)

You haven't heard of Tim and Nancy Cushman - yet. Wait until the city discovers o ya, their recently opened contemporary Japanese restaurant in the Leather District, near South Station. It's Boston's best new restaurant.

The 54-year-old Cushman is a Millis native who graduated from Berklee College of Music with a degree in jazz and classical guitar. He moved to Los Angeles to pursue a career and fell into the restaurant biz. "I was broke and I didn't have a car," he recalls. "There was a restaurant down the street, and so I got a job to pay my bills."

The "new California cuisine" was the rage then, but Cushman got hooked on Japanese fare. "It started with Roy Yamaguchi," he said. "I was one of his sous chefs at his original restaurant in L.A. called 385 North. We were doing sashimi long before anyone got into the whole creative sashimi thing." When Nobu Matsuhisa opened Matsuhisa, Cushman was working across the street. "I went over and ate and talked my way into working with him," he recalled. "I apprenticed with him - it was just Nobu and me prepping during the day."

Cushman was hired as corporate chef for Chicago-based Lettuce Entertain You, a company that operates dozens of concept restaurants, including Brasserie Jo and Maggiano's Little Italy. But his interest in Japanese food was unabated. "One of the first projects we did was open an American diner in Japan," he said. "I went over numerous times, and each time they arranged for me to have an interpreter and to work in Japanese kitchens across the country."

Cushman met and married Nancy, an advertising executive, a dozen years ago in Chicago. The couple moved to Boston in 1998 when she was offered a job here. In the Hub, Tim established a consulting business, setting up restaurants throughout Europe while honing his cooking techniques in Thailand, Hong Kong, Taipei and Japan. Nancy began studying sake. O ya, which opened in March, is the couple's dream come true. Tim cooks; she's the sake sommelier. "We love Boston," Nancy Cushman says. "We didn't want to open anywhere else." "Boston reminds us of Japan," her husband chimes in. "We thought it was the right environment."

**O YA GRILLED STEAK AND SMOKED POTATOES (Serves 2)**

Ingredients:

- 2 medium russet potatoes
- Olive oil
- Kosher salt
- Hickory chips
- 1 1-lb. best-quality steak
- 1 T. sweet butter
- 1 T. low-salt soy sauce
- Freshly grated wasabi or prepared wasabi (available at Japanese markets)
- Wash and dry the potatoes. Rub with olive oil and lightly sprinkle with salt. Place on a lightly greased baking sheet and bake in a preheated 350-degree oven until just tender, approximately 25 minutes.
- Soak a handful of hickory chips in water for at least 30 minutes. Heat a gas or charcoal grill until hot. Drain the hickory chips and carefully place on the hot coals. When they begin to smoke, place the potatoes directly on the grill. Cover the grill and smoke the potatoes for 2 or 3 minutes.
- Set aside, keeping them warm.
- Meanwhile, bring the steak to room temperature. Sprinkle with salt, place on the grill and cook to desired doneness. Remove from the grill, rub with butter and let rest for 2 minutes.
- Divide the soy sauce on two plates. Cut the steak in two and arrange on the soy sauce with the potatoes. Garnish with the buttery steak drippings and the wasabi. Serve immediately.
- Serves 2.