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MORIMOTO MAUI RESTORES OUR FAITH IN THE IRON CHEF

April 22, 2014 · by BarFlySF · in Travel ·

We have a confession to make. During our past few visits to Morimoto's in Honolulu and Napa, we have felt that the noted Iron Chef's restaurants that bear his name had lost touch and become more or less rote. So we weren't surprised by our [local critic's review of the Napa outpost late last year: although "dishes are competently executed," it felt like "paint-by-numbers cooking"](#); he downgraded the food to being worthy of only one and a half stars.

So it was with trepidation that we went to the newest location of Morimoto's in Maui, located in the fabulous Andaz Hotel, where we stayed on a short trip while one of the BarFlys was literally on the beach between jobs. Morimoto Maui restored our faith, but we really give the credit to the local staff who made our meals more memorable than our past few experiences.

As it is the only bar in the Andaz Maui allowed to serve cocktails in a real glass, we were more or less captive to Morimoto and chose to have more than one meal at the bar. Due to regulations, most of the other Andaz restaurants and bars serve great drinks in plasticware. The terrific service and sunset views didn't hurt — just check out the setting for these whiskey cocktails:

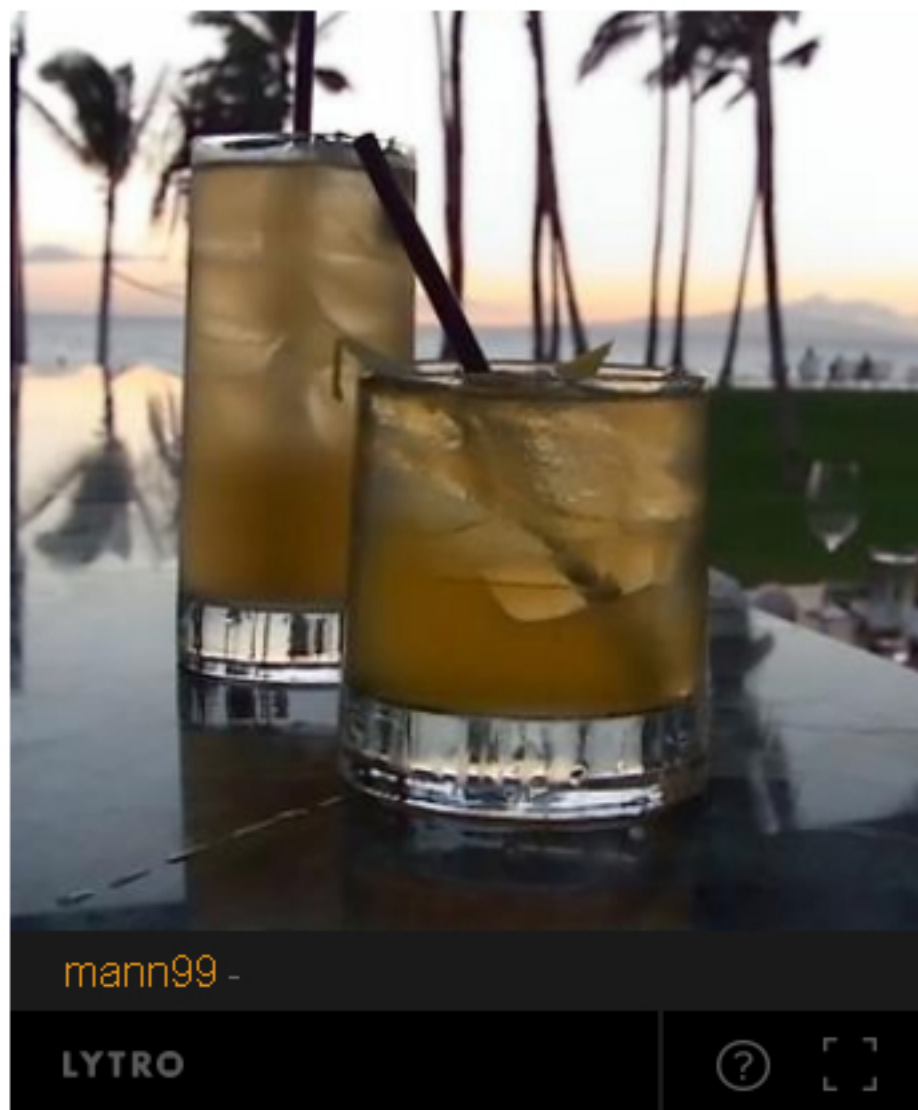
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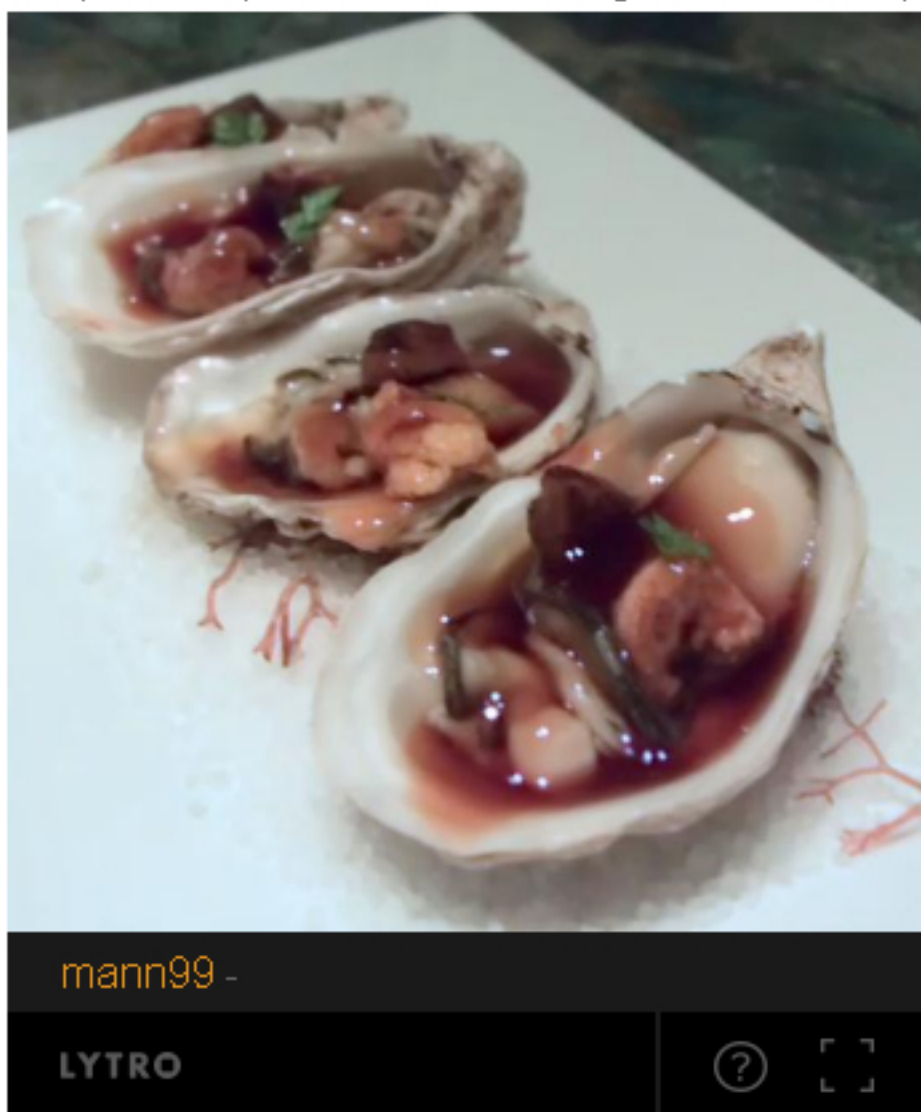
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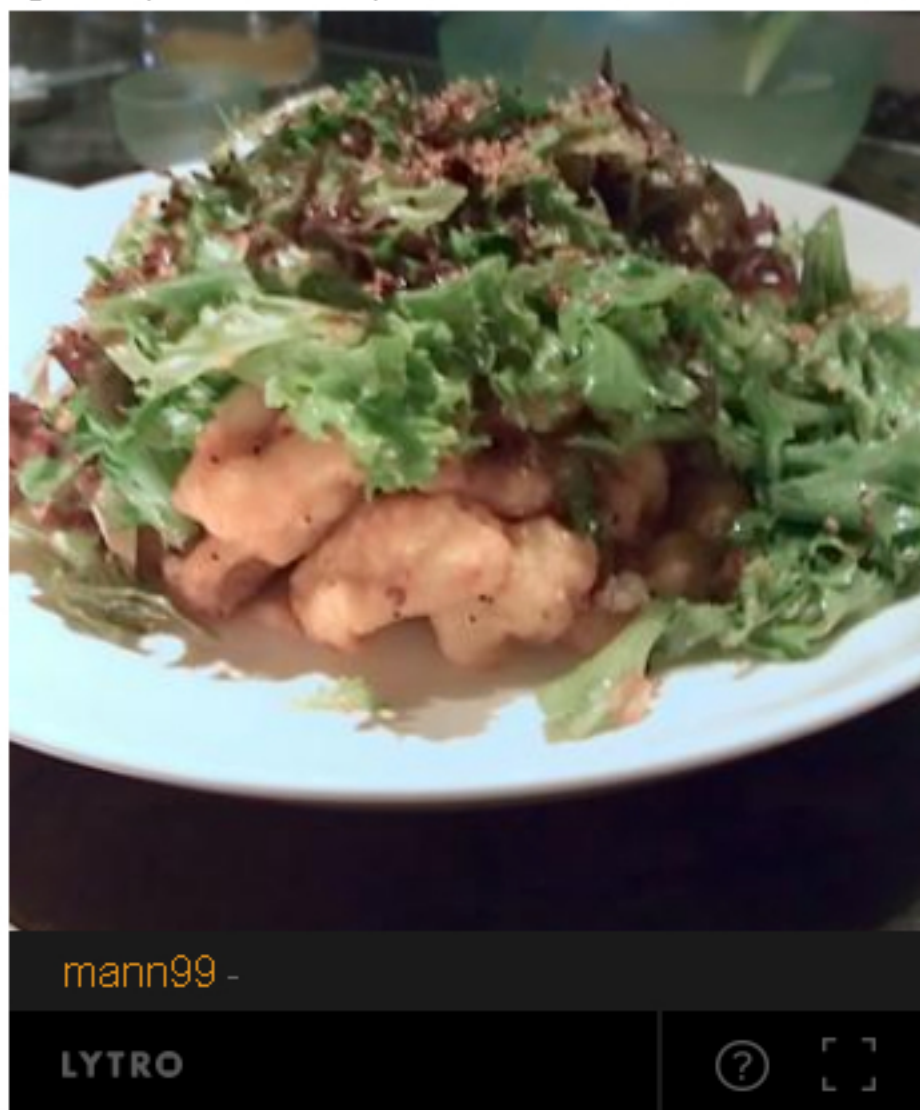
We recognized our bartender, Ryan, from our visit to [Alan Wong's Amasia](#) last September, and he helped to make sure we were in good hands. They happened to concoct a tequila-based drink, aptly named the Green Flash, that included muddled shishito peppers shown on the right:



Now this was a dish we absolutely had to have, as it included three of our favorite items (and one that is banned in California): The Oyster Foie Gras. Market oysters are topped with uni and seared foie gras and then glazed with teriyaki sauce. It was a decadently delicious perfect bite and something we would eat every day if we could:



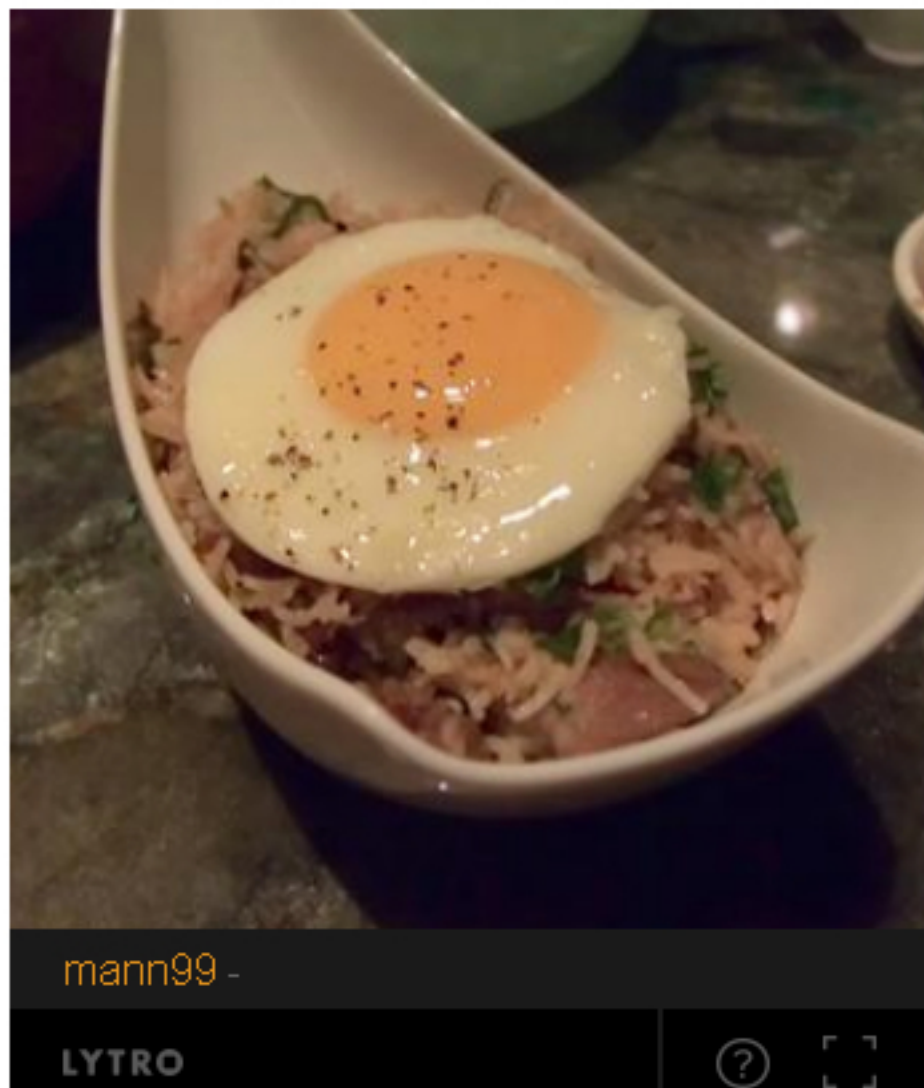
We also tried the Tempura Calamari Salad, built with batter-fried squid buried under the salad greens, quinoa two ways and a nice light white miso dressing. There was nothing healthy about this tasty salad:



We also view the Iron Chef as a sushi master, so we wanted to try the Morimoto-style Chirashi, which features about a dozen different fish and vegetables served on top of the perfect sushi rice:



The Duck Confit Fried Rice topped with a sunny-side up egg was a really reasonably priced and great "side" dish, studded with plenty of tasty crunchy duck thigh pieces:



We made our confession to Ryan after a positive meal experience, and he really felt that the best way to experience Morimoto's is to do the Omakase (chef's choice) meal. We related in a [past post how there are different levels of Omakase](#) meals for return diners, and this visit should bring us to level four. Ryan worked with the chefs to come up with a menu tailored specifically for us, noting that we liked certain items such as foie gras and uni. Morimoto Maui offers two versions of the Omakase, the standard at \$140/person and one that is market-driven with more luxurious ingredients such as Wagyu beef for \$200. So we put ourselves in their hands for the higher end version to see if our faith could be fully restored.

Our tailored Omakase started beautifully healthy with a delicious compressed melon, radish, goat feta cheese and shaved radish dish:

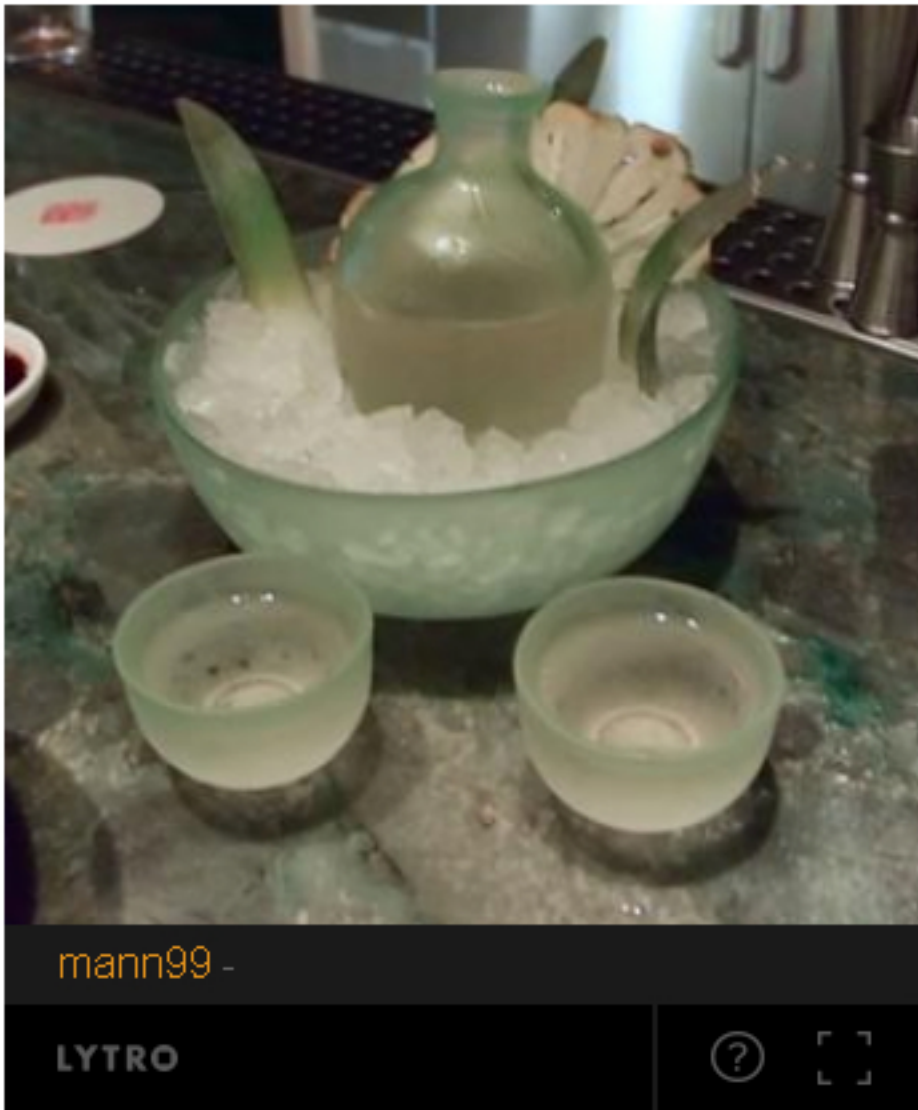


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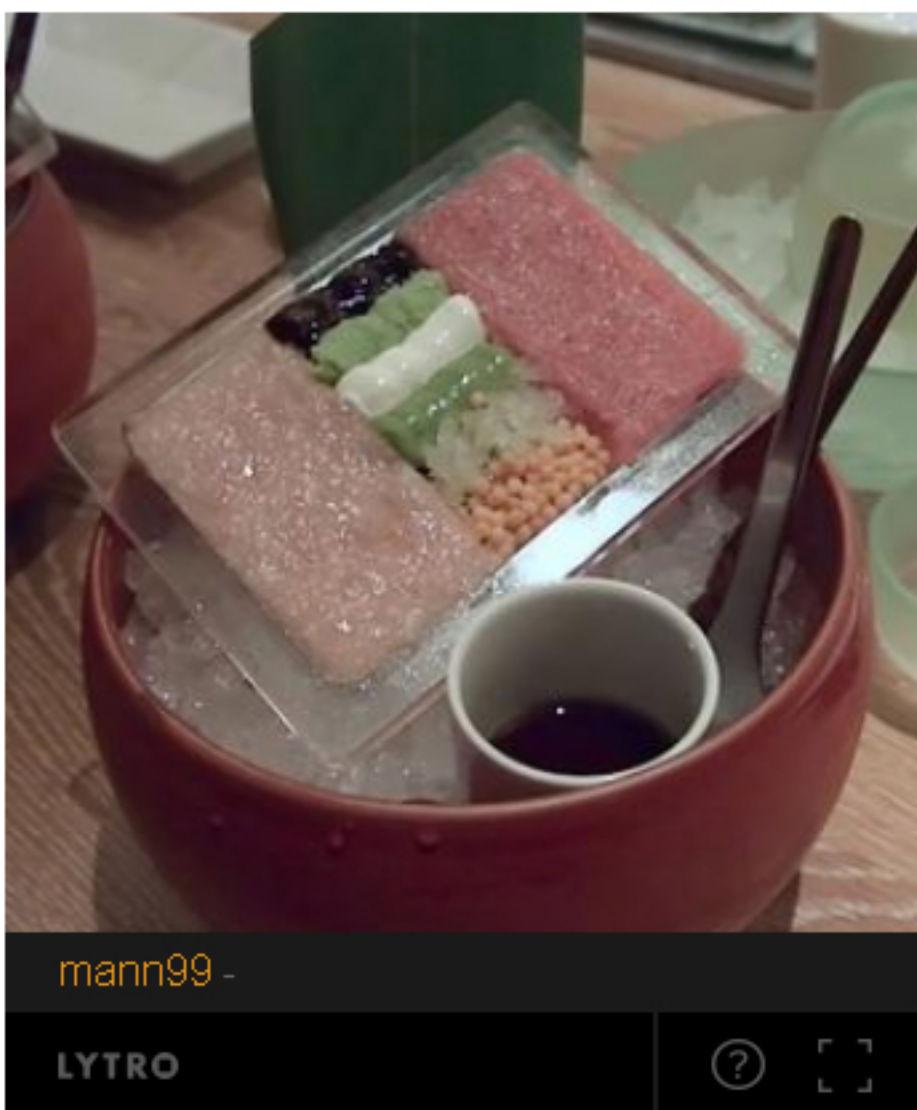
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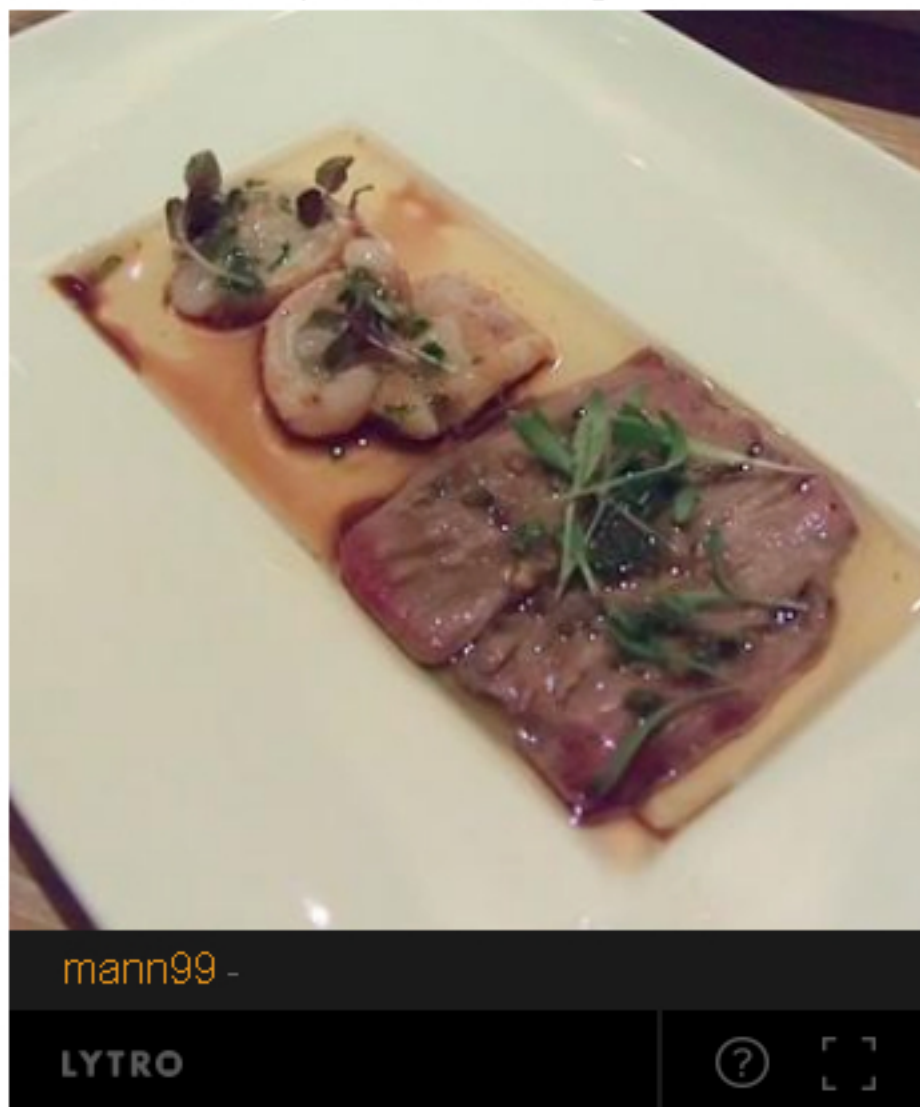
For the duration of our meal we drank Morimoto's Junmai Sake, which uses more than typical polished rice. It was a great pairing for all of the items of the meal (and we easily drank three or four of these carafes):



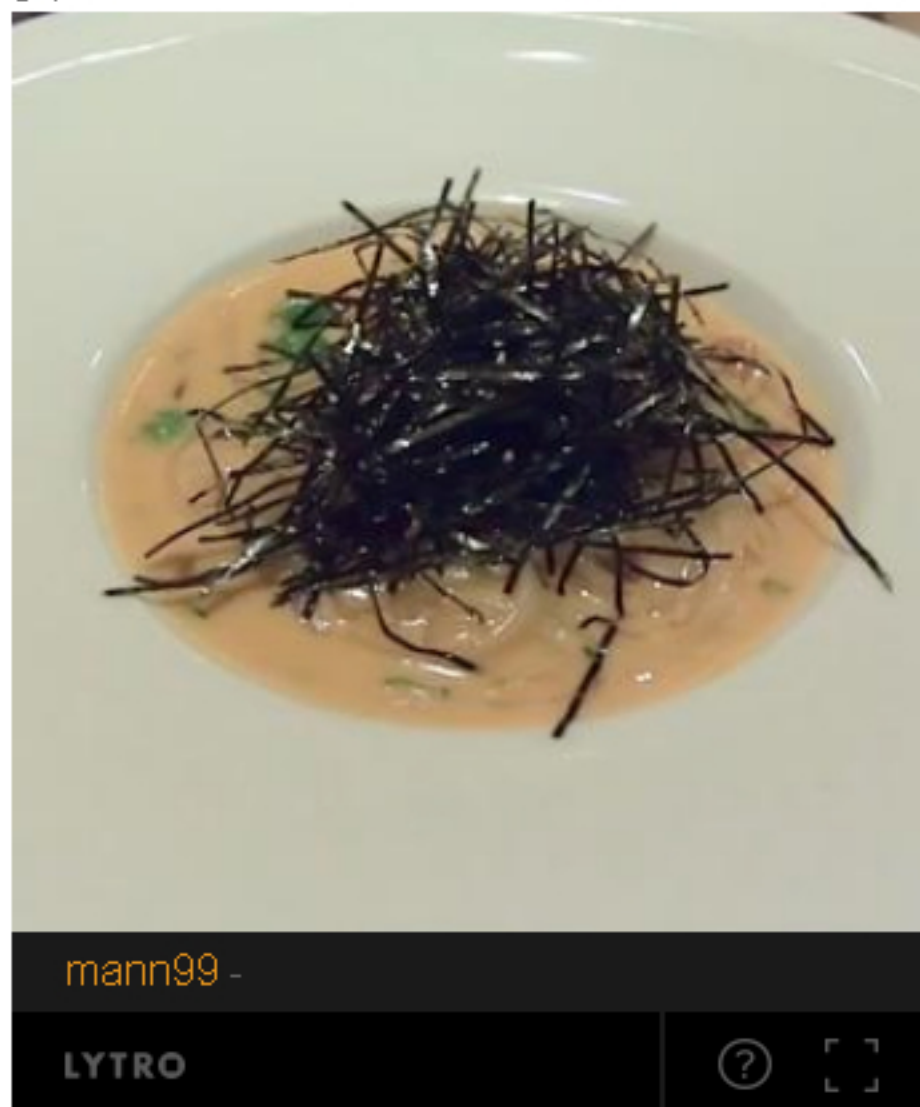
We have already had the next dish, but it didn't matter since it's really one of our favorite Morimoto offerings. But they did something special in that they gave us a combined version of the Toro and Hamachi Tartares that are served finely minced on a glass palette. The accoutrements, added to taste prior to dipping in the soy sauce, included wasabi, nori paste, sour cream, avocado, onion and crunchy rice pearls:



The first surf-and-turf dish came with Wagyu beef and octopus carpaccios that have been flash-cooked in hot oil and dressed with yuzu. The octopus was a little rubbery, but the beef was definitely melt-in-the-mouth great:



The Sea Urchin Carbonara is available at all of the Morimoto's, but it was a welcome repeat dish for us since we love our uni. This very Japanese interpretation of the Italian classic included Udon noodle, smoked bacon bits, peas and crispy shallots in a creamy sea urchin sauce. The nori (dried seaweed) strips that topped the bowl added even more umami to the very rich dish as it was all stirred together. Interestingly enough, the uni used for this dish came from Boston:



This next dish was a special creation just for us to sate our craving for the banned goose liver. See-through slices of Bigeye tuna draped over a piece of seared foie gras, resting on a buttery piece of toasted brioche:



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Here's a cross-section view of this successful surf-and-turf dish, which they really should consider putting on the menu:

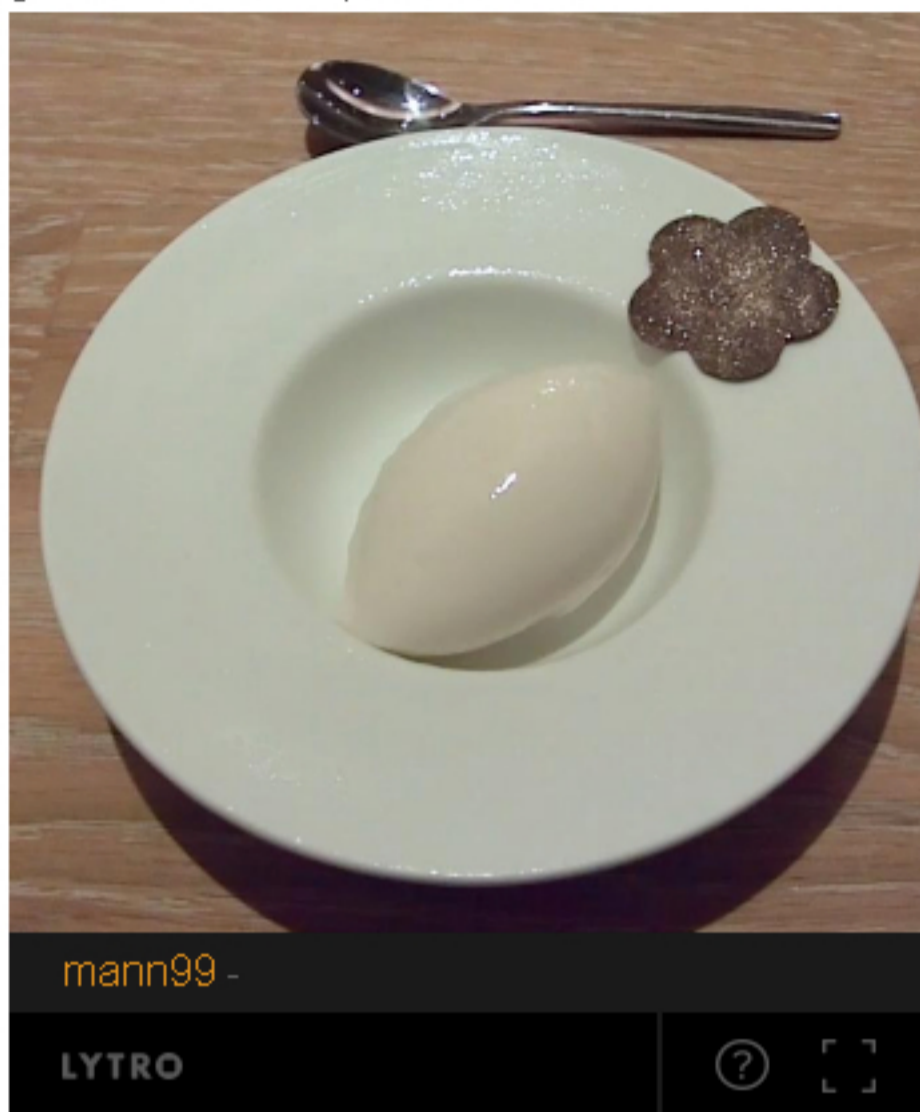


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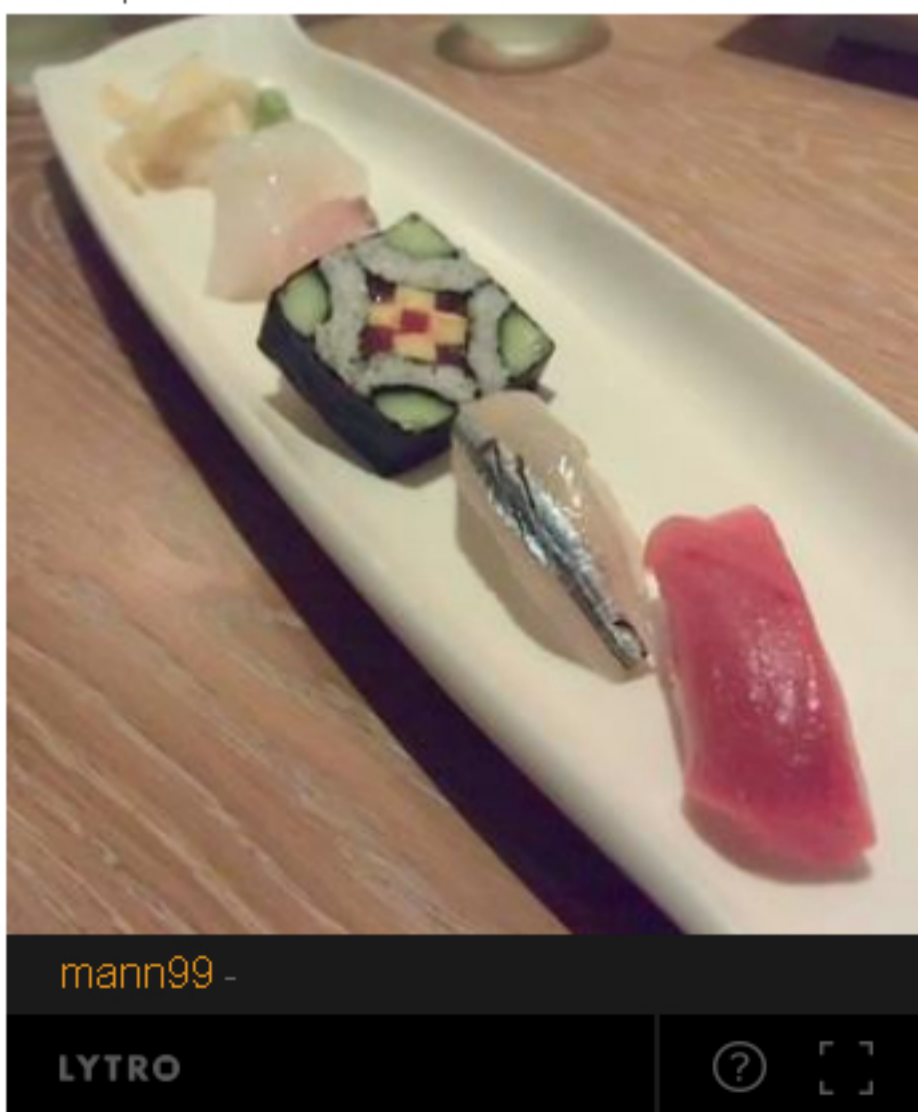
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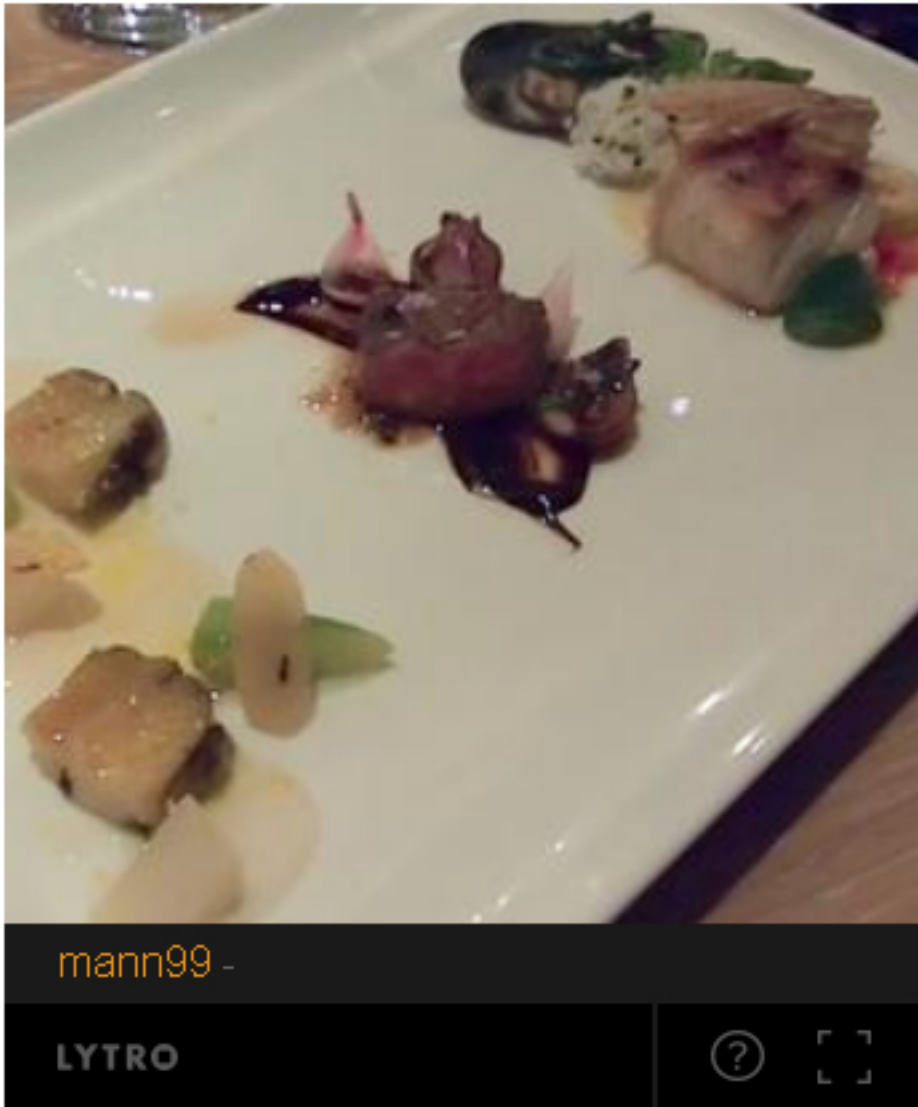
As an intermezzo to prepare us for the next phase, they brought out a soursop sorbet with a beautiful gold-dusted bittersweet chocolate flower. A cousin to the cherimoya, the soursop brought a nice tropical taste of kiwi, banana and pineapple, with just enough tartness to act as a palate cleanser:



The sushi course was next: pieces of Chu-Toro (medium fatty tuna belly), Needlefish, the Iron Chef's famous Shikai Maki that looks like a stained glass window, Shima Aji and raw octopus:



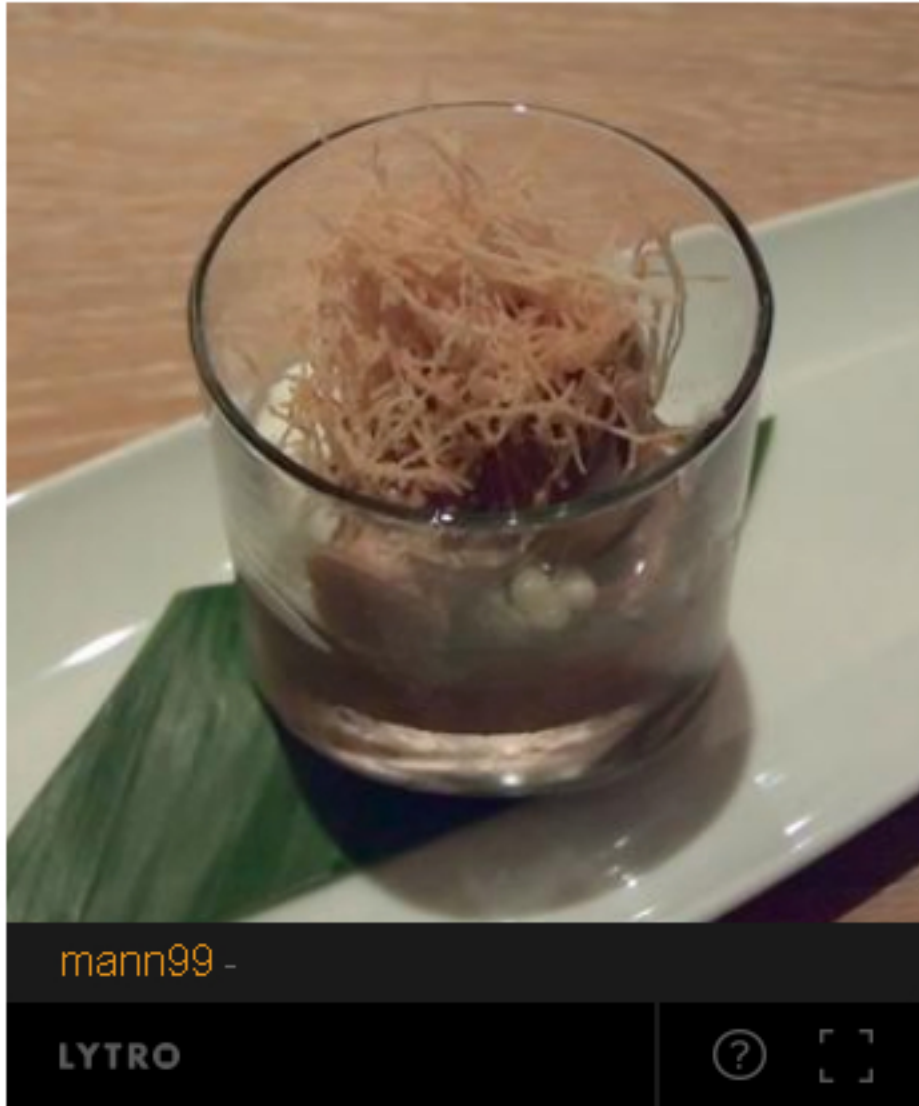
The full size main entrée was comprised of surf-turf-surf components. On the left of the plate is abalone with glazed vegetables, and the center contained a very marbled Wagyu filet with a Korean black garlic sauce. The right side of the plate contained a grilled Opakapaka fish and mussels served with sushi rice and a delicate Thai curry sauce made with coconut milk:



We were pretty full at this point, but they served us the first of two dessert courses made up of aloe sorbet surrounded by soursop lime cream, grapefruit "caviar" and macadamia nut crunch. It was light, tropical and a perfect dessert to follow such an extravagant meal:



The last item did not disappoint the chocolate lover in us. Their pastry chef must be a wizard to concoct this chocolate two ways dessert that included a custard ice cream, coconut sponge cake, Surfing Girl goat feta mousse and tapioca pearls all topped with shredded phyllo dough:



With many thanks to the local staff, our experience at Morimoto Maui far exceeded that of our previous visits at other locations. It's definitely worth seeking out on the Wailea side of the island, and is especially convenient for those staying at the Andaz hotel, our new home away from home in Maui.

<http://maui.andaz.hyatt.com/en/hotel/dining/morimoto-maui.html>