

## Yama Izakaya

words & photos: Ellen Gurley

Yama Izakaya has opened its doors recently in Plaza-Midwood. It is a sister restaurant to an already booming spot in SouthPark (a [www.YamaAsianFusion.com](http://www.YamaAsianFusion.com)) known for their extremely fresh sushi and live items. Yama Izakaya is still spanking brand new. Almost eight months old (when this prints). If you're intimidated by new restaurants or funny names, don't despair, Izakaya rhymes with and sounds a lot like Hezekiah and the restaurant and concept don't aim to intimidate. The idea is actually to unwind. Izakaya is an upbeat, afterwork concept in Japan. Nothing intimidating about that. As an added bonus, the staff are very informative and not in a condescending type of way. It's very user friendly and it didn't hurt to learn that the family (the Yama, I presume) has thirty years of food creation under their belts; learning all over the globe (so I don't have to travel) and bringing Japan to me.



I wanted to see what it was all about so I went in during their first two months and the place was packed. My companion and I sat at the bar and *felt out* the wait. We enjoyed a cucumber saketini and proceeded to another restaurant... at least for THAT evening. I ended up waiting for the buzz to die down a bit and ventured in again months later. It was worth the wait.

The evening began with an extremely refreshing blackberry mojito (a signature drink). Upon checking out the menu, I thought that it was built very much like a Spanish / Mediterranean restaurant as it featured small bites (tapas) and yakitori (souvlaki). I am a fan of sharing apps and meat on a stick so we made a few selections; fried oysters, ankimo (cooked monkfish liver) (the latter was to satisfy my adventurous side), lamb lollipops (I get it if I see it - everywhere - because lamb) AND some bacon wrapped scallops. We left nothing on the plate.



Then the manager, Paul, (having spent many years under the Yama umbrella and truly proud to be a part of it all) recommended a soon-to-be-on-the-regular-menu-item: pork belly buns. My companion perked up at the suggestion and said that I had to have it... so I did and this sealed the deal. I'm in love...with Yama. This is the beautiful thing about waiting. Sometimes when a restaurant is new, they reassess things after six months, then they try out new stuff. I felt like I had just won the lottery. The pictures I took of these pork belly buns were among the top ten favourite pictures I have ever taken - beating babies in ranking (sorry, kids).

As we held our bellies thinking we couldn't have any more, we ordered the lychee martini (another fan favourite) and highly suggested by our server. It was one of the best things I've ever put to my lips. We were prepared to say goodnight then our bellies told us there was just a little more room - as we discussed the fact that this place was known for its ramen - real ramen. Lucky us (and lucky you for knowing now) we had just enough room to be further impressed. Try it for yourself. We had the miso and I can still taste it (in my mind) many days later.

[www.YamaIzakaya.com](http://www.YamaIzakaya.com)  
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