

A bunch of dark purple grapes is shown against a dark background. A stream of red liquid is pouring from the bottom of the bunch into a glass. The word "quench" is written in a bright pink, cursive font across the top of the grapes.

*quench*

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## INTRODUCING NIKKEI

**ON A BUSY FRIDAY EVENING AT MONTREAL'S TIRADITO RESTAURANT, BEHIND A 60-SEAT U-SHAPED BAR** that extends from one end of the modish 2,000 sq ft eatery to the other, chefs serve up tapas-style Latin American fare: think anticuchos, papa rellena and ceviche. However, among the varied menu, divvied up among pescado, verduras, carne, especialidades and postres, many dishes — most notably, the eatery's eponymous tiradito, a fusion of Peruvian ceviche and Japanese sashimi — make for eccentric food pairings, emblematic of an imaginative, age-old aesthetic.

Tiradito, which opened in the city's entertainment district this past fall, is one among a growing number of establishments across Europe and North America bringing Nikkei cuisine, a product of the influx of Japanese immigrants to Peru at the turn of the 19th century, to the fore (Chotto Matte in London is another, along with New York's Sen Sakana and famed chef Ferran Adrià's Pakta in Barcelona). Nikkei is neither Japanese nor Peruvian, but rather a perfect amalgamation of both culinary traditions. While chefs around the world are beginning to experiment within this rich offshoot of the Japanese diaspora, in Peru where it all began, Nikkei continues to reinvent itself.

"You won't find Nikkei in Japan," explains Mitsuharu Tsumura, the Peruvian-Japanese chef and owner of Maido in the posh Miraflores district of Lima, which last year ranked no. 13 on San Pellegrino's World's 50 Best Restaurants list, and no. 2 on the Latin America's 50 Best Restaurants list. "Nikkei is distinctly Peruvian."

In the late 1800s, Japanese workers traveled to Peru to work as labourers and settled in the country once their government contract expired. Making use of the local ingredients and the abundant variety of fish oft discarded by Peruvians, they created singular dishes — reinventing Peruvian classics with Japanese flair. Peru's Japanese population is South America's second larg-

est after Brazil, and since the first wave of Japanese immigrants, helped by the establishment of Japanese corporations in Peru in the mid 1970s, Nikkei has evolved into the hybrid culinary innovation enjoyed today.

"Peruvian and Japanese flavours go very well together," expounds Tsumura. "Japanese cuisine is very light. Peruvian is spicy. It's a balance of flavours. They are so different that they attract each other."

At Maido, the eminent chef pushes the boundaries of Nikkei cuisine, bringing the interplay of Japanese cooking technique and Peruvian ingredients to novel heights: sachapapa soba noodles made with Amazonian potatoes; sushi a lo pobre, a steak nigiri topped with a quail egg whose yoke is injected with ponzu (soy) sauce; and the eatery's famed lapas cebiche, shellfish served with ají amarillo (a yellow chili pepper) and leche de tigre (a citrus concoction in which the raw fish marinates, frozen with liquid nitrogen, a nod to molecular gastronomy) are just three offerings off the 15-course "Nikkei Experience" menu.

Born and bred in Lima, Tsumura is well versed in the intricacies of Nikkei cuisine. In addition to heading Maido, in 2013 he co-authored *Nikkei is Peru*, an authoritative compendium on the subject. A graduate of the culinary arts program at Johnson & Wales University in Providence, Rhode Island, Tsumura has apprenticed in upscale kitchens both in the States and Peru, and even traveled to Osaka to learn traditional sushi-making and Japanese cuisine before opening his own restaurant in his native Peru.

While Peruvian cuisine is getting its due praise across Europe and North America, Tsumura one day hopes to bring Nikkei to the more conservative enclave from whence its forefathers came.

"Japan is rooted in tradition," says Tsumura. "It does not look too much to South America but they are starting to, so it will happen." ✱