

BEST OF THE INLAND NORTHWEST 2010

NORTH IDAHO'S BEST SUSHI

Syringa

On any given night, Syringa is likely to be nearly packed full, with a small line of those hopeful locals or forgetful few who neglected to make a reservation. No matter, though; it's the kind of place that is 1) worth the wait, and 2) once you're seated, you're likely to become friends with your neighbor, assuming you do not already know each other. After all, this is where North Idaho goes for sushi.

Sockeye salmon in teriyaki sauce, Wafu steak with gooey caramelized onion and shitake mushrooms, Chilean sea bass with eggplant ratatouille, or a platter brimming with fresh, beautiful sushi. Great service, reasonable prices, a casual but hip vibe. And, of course, the opportunity to run into half a dozen people you know on any given night. That's Syringa.

Owners Autumn and Viljo Basso credit their staff with providing great service. Many are long-time employees, even since the place opened in 2006.

The Bassos also credit their customers. Autumn says, "We thought the win was great! It is confirmation of what we have known all along — that we have the best customers and we'd like to thank them for nominating us."

What sets them apart? "We care!" says Autumn. "We care about customer service, food quality, atmosphere, consistency, fairness and good prices." She adds, "We know we don't get it right 100 percent of the time, but we try."

It isn't the first time (nor likely the last) that Syringa has been honored with a readers choice award. North Idaho Business Journal and even a few Web-based publications have been singing their praises for several years, including the recent "Fork-n-Cork Award" from Idaho Cuisine magazine for Chef Viljo.

For an encore, the two Coeur d'Alene-area natives have started a recycling program at the restaurant, including composting kitchen scraps.

They're also working, of course, to expand the menu here and there with new items like the Mexican roll (tempura avocado, kaiware and cucumber, topped with albacore, avocado and pico de gallo) and pan-seared Alaskan scallops served with Swiss chard and vanilla teriyaki sauce.

And they've expanded the Website, which is super-cool and gives you a menu you can download and use for phone-in orders — you know, in case you just can't wait another minute for a little something good from Syringa. (CS)

