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Kenichiro Ooe
Chef de Cuisine, Kozue

Kenichiro Ooe, deeply knowledgeable and skilled in all of the principal styles of traditional cuisine, is the man behind the elegant, artful meals served at Kozue, quite possibly the most exquisite contemporary Japanese restaurant in the world.

As Kozue's chef de cuisine, he has created a menu that spans a range of culinary pleasures, from hearty, country-style dishes, to his own innovative interpretation of *kaiseki*, the highly refined cuisine that traditionally accompanies the tea ceremony and features artful presentations of prized delicacies.

Ooe's appetizers and hors-d'oeuvres are presented in arrangements that are as beautiful to look at as they are delicious to eat. (Imagine Fresh Figs and Ginkgo Nuts in a Savory Sesame Sauce; or Scallops Brushed with Miso and Grilled with Minced Rape Shoots.) His clear soups are invitingly fragrant. He offers one of the finest selections of sashimi to be found. His a la carte selections offer inventive treatments for grilled and simmered dishes, such as Sake-flavored Snapper Head with Young Pepper Leaves; Grilled Butter Fish Flavored with Miso and Butterbur Buds; or Beef Sukiyaki with Warabi Mountain Vegetables and Burdock Root. These and all dishes at Kozue are artistically served in one-of-a-kind earthenware pieces crafted by artisans throughout Japan and selected by Ooe's expert eye.

Because Ooe holds a government license to handle Fugu (blowfish), a delicacy prized by gourmets, Kozue also offers a complete blowfish menu in season, including Nikogori (blowfish aspic), Usuzukuri (thinly sliced raw blowfish), Shirakoyaki (grilled soft roe), Chirinabe (blowfish and vegetables in a pot) and Zosui (blowfish porridge).

Born in 1960, Ooe began his culinary training at the age of 19, learning the cuisine of Kyoto at a restaurant called Daimonji. At the Hotel Sunroute Sakata, where he worked in 1980, he acquired the basics of French cuisine. In 1981, he familiarized himself with

the cuisine of the Kansai region of western Japan by training at Hamasaku, a prestigious restaurant in Tokyo's Ginza.

He spent the next two years at Kagaya restaurant in Tokyo's lively Akasaka district, exploring the cuisine of Northern Japan. From 1986 to 1989, he moved to Shikitei restaurant, learning the style and techniques of *kaiseki*. It was during this time that Ooe also obtained his license for handling Fugu. This fish contains a deadly nerve toxin in many of its parts, including the skeleton skin, and internal organs. The toxin is so lethal that a mere drop can kill you. Restaurant chefs must obtain a license from the government to show their skill in cleaning, detoxifying, and filleting the fish – in split-second timing. Ooe studied for three years before taking the rigorous examinations.

In 1989, he accepted a post as chef de cuisine at Tachikichi in Kichijoji, a Tokyo restaurant specializing in seafood. The following year, he was hired as chef de cuisine at Koyou, a *kaiseki* restaurant in Ginza.

Ooe joined Park Hyatt Tokyo when it opened in 1994 as chef de cuisine of Kozue.

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