

*From the Los Angeles Times*

## **First Look: Bond Street**

By -- S. Irene Virbila

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WHERE'S our waiter? Is that him? Or is it that guy? My husband looks confused. I guess he failed to notice what was immediately obvious to we three women: the male servers at the new Bond Street in Beverly Hills all look alike, so much so we're wondering if they're part of an Orlando Bloom cloning program.

Bond Street, for those who don't frequent trendy venues in downtown Manhattan, is the West Coast edition of the restaurant that has held fashionable, sushi-eating New Yorkers in thrall for a decade. Its founder, Jonathan Morr, has joined forces with SoHo's 60 Thompson hotel to take on L.A. with the new Thompson Beverly Hills hotel and its reiteration of Bond Street.

Excuse me for not being more excited, but do we look like we need more sushi? This is, after all, where two of the country's top sushi chefs -- Nobu Matsuhisa and Masa Takayama (now of Masa in New York) -- introduced their groundbreaking cuisine. And if raw tuna cubes coated in blue cheese is one of Bond Street's best shots, I'm not sure we're going to be a pushover for their take on the sushi genre.

The kitchen makes a mean seaweed salad with four or five types of seaweed, each with a different texture and taste. Steamed chicken dumplings wrapped in *yuba* (soy milk skin) are pretty good too, but the Kurobuta pork spring roll is basically two tiny bites for \$9.

Designer Dodd Mitchell got the dark, sultry look down, though. Just off the lobby of the former Beverly Wilshire hotel, Bond Street leads with a small bar and a hand-hewn communal table (awash in candlelight, of course), then comes a long narrow room with banquettes and booths lined up along the walls and, at the very back, the sushi bar.

Most diners are going for the inventive-sounding sushi rolls -- hot eel dice with sweet soy and sliced almonds, soba noodles rolled up with snow crab legs or sun-dried tomato and avocado with garlic ponzu and green tea salt. We let the chef decide and order *omakase*, which starts at \$40 per person.

It arrives on a round blue platter, each morsel of seafood nestled in what looks like a glass petri dish -- not exactly an inspiring presentation. It could be wild salmon topped with salmon roe, a chewy octopus tentacle, a little yellowtail sashimi or whatever the chef is featuring that day. Little of it is revelatory and some of it is quite strange, like that tuna with blue cheese. The more peckish can order a grilled strip steak, rack of lamb or organic chicken.

To cap off the evening, you might indulge in the Valrhona chocolate fondue. Admittedly, it's not very cutting edge (and the strawberries aren't even ripe), but perfect for passing the time at one of those sleek booths while keeping an eye on the scene. And that's the real fun here. But given the so far unastonishing sushi, it will be curious to see if the posh setting and lithe Orlando Bloom look alikes will be enough to turn the beautiful black-clad people into regulars.

**WHERE:** Thompson Beverly Hills hotel, 9360 Wilshire Blvd., Beverly Hills.

**WHEN:** 6 p.m. to 11 p.m. Sun. to Wed., 6 p.m. to 12 a.m. Thu. to Sat.; breakfast 7 a.m. to 11 a.m. and lunch 12 p.m. to 3 p.m. daily. Full bar. Valet parking.

**PRICE:** Appetizers, \$6 to \$28; tempura, \$9 to \$16; main courses, \$24 to \$34; sushi rolls, \$8 to \$14; sushi and sashimi, \$8 to \$28; sushi/sashimi *omakase* begins at \$40 per person; *omakase* begins at \$80 per person.

**INFO:** (310) 601-2255