

Review of:

Hawai'i Regional Cuisine: The Food Movement That Changed the Way Hawai'i Eats

Samuel Hideo Yamashita. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2019. Pp. xii + 181, preface, maps, glossary, notes, selected bibliography, index.

Review by: Katrina Wynn

In the book *Hawai'i Regional Cuisine: The Food Movement That Changed the Way Hawai'i Eats*, historian Samuel Hideo Yamashita offers a detailed account of the Hawai'i Regional Cuisine (HRC) movement of the 1990s and 2000s. A dozen chefs launched this movement in a deliberate attempt to overhaul the fine dining scene in Hawai'i by shifting the focus away from French cuisine, made with imported ingredients, to a locally-sourced hybrid cuisine based partially on French styles, but also adding Asian and American elements. The book's five chapters trace the history, development, and impact of the HRC movement and the careers of its founding chefs.

The book begins with "Origins," which examines the impact of colonialism and Americanism on the Islands and the resulting fine dining culture. Yamashita lays out the foundation for Hawai'i Regional Cuisine, specifically one in which white male chefs cooking French food had come to dominate fine cuisine on the Islands. This chapter provides a very informative overview of the historical development of fine cuisine in Hawai'i.

The achievements of the HRC chefs during the 1990s and 2000s, with a focus on their restaurants, awards, publicity, cookbooks, television appearances, and extensive networking with celebrity chefs, are detailed in the second chapter, "Development." Yamashita goes into considerable detail about the chefs' previous training and awards, likely in part to establish their culinary pedigrees. This encyclopedic information is perhaps most interesting to an audience of chefs, culinary historians, and enthusiasts. To folklorists and foodways scholars, it speaks to the importance of formal professional chef training, experience, mentorship, and robust apprenticeship traditions. I found maps of the locations of restaurants owned by HRC chefs a nice addition to the chapter.

The next chapter, "Cuisine," follows the same timeline as Chapter 2, but examines what and how the chefs cooked, based on their commitment to use local products and their general leaning toward Euro-Asian fusion cuisine. *Digest* readers may find the introduction of the "Dishes" section in Chapter 3 interesting, as it discusses influences on the chefs, especially their own personal foodways and the regional cooking of Hawai'i. The theory discussion, "Semiotics" in this chapter, may also appeal to folklorists as it is the only place in the book where Yamashita ventures an interpretive analysis of the HRC.

The fourth chapter, "Successors," focuses on the 2010s and the directions in which six young "post-HRC" chefs took fine dining in Hawai'i as they moved away from French cuisine and toward one based more on personal memories and local foodways—something of special interest to *Digest* readers.

The final chapter, “Legacies,” examines how HRC chefs have influenced the food scene in Hawai'i. In the section “Food Scene,” Yamashita explains how the impact ranges from helping them open the door to women and people of color to increasing the prestige of a culinary career. He also explains how the HRC has affected Hawai'ian food production. *Digest* readers may also find this chapter interesting because of its discussion about sustainability and the results of the booming food business on farming and fisheries supply chains.

Despite the detail, there is no discussion in the book about how most of the HRC chefs were not from Hawai'i yet came to define fine dining cuisine in Hawai'i. Yamashita also examines the twelve HRC chefs in a kind of isolation, without placing them in the context of other fine dining chefs in Hawai'i during the 1990s and 2000s nor establishing whether the HRC chefs had a horizontal impact as well as a vertical one. This narrow focus on the original HRC *members* undercuts Yamashita's argument about the prominence of the HRC *movement*.

Moreover, this book would have benefitted from significant editing to manage the level of detail more effectively. While the chapters are often dense with information, there is much repetition, not all supporting details seem relevant, and there are occasional abrupt one-line insertions of scholarly references from other fields that seem outside of the book's scope. Finally, updated information could have been included for events occasionally alluded to in the future tense when they are now many years in the past.

At its core, however, *Hawai'i Regional Cuisine* is an homage to the founding chefs of the Hawai'i Regional Cuisine movement and is worth skimming for the satisfying nuggets. Most *Digest* readers may prefer to focus on the first chapter with its interesting history of Hawai'ian fine cuisine, and on each chapter's clear and succinct conclusion.