

# Crafting Atmosphere

Yushoken's thoughtful details like high ceilings, a vibrant mural, and flexible seating arrangements create a welcoming and dynamic dining experience

Architect

**ECOTECTURE DESIGN STUDIO**

Location

**QUEZON CITY**

Lot Area

**500 SQM**

Through materiality, a structure can express its values and personality. CEO and Founder of Nippon Hasha group of companies, Ryan Cruz, acknowledges that each of his brands have a distinct personality in which he wishes to express in the dining experience. Restaurants such as Kazunori, Mendokoro, Yushoken and Marudori each have a level of distinction even though they all serve Japanese fare.

“Kazunori is like the mom. Marudori, Yushoken, and Mendokoro are the kids. Yushoken and Mendokoro are twins. They're the same thing yet the format is just different. Yushoken is full service while Mendokoro is a bar format,” Cruz explains.

Yushoken's latest foray into Quezon City was not an impulsive decision. Instead, it's a move that was driven by data and research. “We knew we wanted to be in Quezon City for the longest time. We started thinking about it when we started looking into Google Analytics. They tell you where people are searching you from and where are they calling you from. Quezon City was always number one,” Cruz shares. “It was solidified when we did the take home kits because we were actually delivering up to the residents in Quezon City. We had real data.”

The restaurant stands firmly on the corner of Panay and Eugenio Lopez Jr. with gabion walls of stone and straight slats of wood. Designed by LEED-accredited architect Liza Morales of Ecotecture Design Studio, the structure needed to make a strong first impression. “We saw Yushoken as a confident, brave younger sibling of the Nippon Hasha brands. We wanted to give a strong statement in this neighborhood and say, we are here now,” says Morales. “In the facade there's a contrast between the stone and wooden slats. The gabion wall was a material that I wanted to experiment with for quite some time. They convey the organic parts of Japan while the wooden slats are a little more of the order which the Japanese are known for.”

With a 190-square meter footprint, the structure wouldn't be as arresting to the eye if it only stood with one story. The height also allowed for a high ceiling with a dramatic feature of wood slats descending down and leading the eye to the window into the kitchen. A grid work of timber



With a high ceiling and descending wood slats leading to the kitchen window, Yushoken's interior design by Liza Morales creates an airy and spacious feel, enhanced by the interplay of light and shadows.





A colorful mural by Koo Koo Ramos with gold accents and subtle Japanese iconography adds vibrancy and human touch to Yushoken's space, balancing the hard surfaces with organic elements



To accommodate various guest sizes and enhance hospitality, Yushoken Panay's floor area features booth seating and flexible configurations, learning from past experiences to improve customer service



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resembling the Japanese chidori toy create shadows as the sun passes through the window. The black wall is textured and a colorful mural by Koo Koo Ramos with golden accents and Japanese iconography hidden in it adds just enough color to the space to create interest.

“The mural, we wanted something that wasn’t too in-your-face Japanese. It gives it that nice organic-ness of the space. We didn’t just want the space to have lines and right angles. We wanted to balance the space with human touch against the hard surfaces. Those textures with the gold—it gives it that materiality. It’s subtle touches that give that Japanese feel,” points out Morales.

Cruz was inspired by the nine-meter long mural in T-Site in Daikanyama by artist Masatake Kouzaki that featured a good use of gold leaf. For this branch, the mural replaces the traditional ikebana display his other brands have in the restaurants.

On one side of the restaurant, there is booth seating and a wave of wood slats that undulate above. “I like booths because people can think of it as their own space for that time and they can get lost in it. And there’s a bit of privacy,” Cruz explains. “Operationally however we knew the booths would make it more difficult for customers.” Cruz is referring to the fact that booths can only accommodate a certain number of guests noting that in their Alabang branch there was only one area for one big group. “If one group gets it, the other group would have to wait at least two hours,” he says.

Learning from this observation, most of Yushoken Panay’s floor area can be configured for a wide variety of guests, especially for larger groups. Cruz was adamant in having the design of this branch help its staff be more hospitable to the customers it serves. “We needed to be quite flexible, and this space allows that flexibility. That’s the point. It’s allowing design to enable you to be more hospitable to your customers. Design alone doesn’t make you more hospitable. It’s only an enabler. Ultimately, it’s people who give hospitality. It’s how you make customers feel.”

After Cruz noticed a number of customers waiting outside in the heat or in the rain, he had the front portion enclosed in glass and air conditioned it to make waiting for a table more bearable. While others may feel like adding a second floor for more seating would solve this problem, Cruz has his reasons. “The reason why it’s one floor is because the distance between the kitchen to the customer needs to be as short as possible.”

This setup also makes the space feel more airy and spacious. “With design, you have to exercise restraint. That’s something we always challenge ourselves with every project,” says Morales. “There’s such a thing as going overboard. We don’t want it to feel overwhelming. So we used colors and textures sparingly. We just wanted to make sure that it exudes that personality without making it feel too much.”

One of Cruz’s proud moments for this branch is actually hidden from the customer’s view. “The biggest change that we’ve had in terms of design of our restaurants that has an impact on our customers is what the customers don’t see. It’s the back portion.”

A side entrance outside leads to the kitchen where deliveries can happen discreetly. Stairs lead to an expansive second floor dedicated to the crew’s welfare including a locker and dressing room, a lounge area, an office, and a restroom. “I feel guilty when I look at earlier iterations of my restaurants because admittedly this is the first time I’ve gotten into this industry. I didn’t know what I didn’t even know. When I look at my old restaurants, there’s not enough space for people to really take a break. When people have that space to chill out during their breaks, it makes for a happier team member and they’re able to render better service.”

Notably, Nippon Hasha claims to hold the lowest turnover of employees in the industry. Also, this branch performs the strongest within its group of companies in bottomline sales. The structure’s design enables the restaurant to render its best service to its customers while maintaining the bold, confident personality of Yushoken. ■



Yushoken’s single-floor setup keeps the kitchen close to customers, while an enclosed, air-conditioned waiting area enhances comfort, reflecting Cruz’s commitment to thoughtful design that supports hospitality



The contrast between the organic gabion walls and orderly wooden slats on Yushoken’s facade reflects the balance of natural and structured elements in Japanese design