At new Metairie Rock-n-Sake, there’s less rock, but more roll

Also, Top Taco fest coming to N.O.

The Warehouse District was full of dark corners back in 1998 when Rock-n-Sake first opened there. Soon, though, the upstart sushi joint lured a young, adventurous crowd to its Fulton Street door with a pulsing ambiance somewhere between restaurant, lounge and nightclub. Nearly 20 years later, a new Rock-n-Sake (2913 Metairie Rd., Metairie, 504-267-9761) has emerged along the suburban strip of Old Metairie. Here, the young, adventurous crowd often means kids, literally, dining out with their parents and picking through a menu of sashimi with mango-jalapeno puree and rolls finished with the blast of a blowtorch. Remember when kids ate chicken fingers or nothing? Not here.

This latest Rock-n-Sake opened earlier in November, utterly transforming what had been a utilitarian little box of a building. From a covered deck fronting Metairie Road, roll-down garage doors open to a dining room swept with contemporary design.
A one-time store on Metairie Road was thoroughly remodeled to create a new location of Rock-n-Sake, the sushi restaurant that got its start in the Warehouse District in the late 1990s.

The purple ninja roll at Rock-n-Sake is finished with a blast from the blowtorch and a tangle of pickled purple onions.

dance music plays through the sound system. But the new Rock-n-Sake still feels several notches mellower than the downtown version.

The different setting even recasts some of the dishes. For instance, the PB&J roll always felt like drunk food downtown. After all, this is a crunchy, panko-crusted fried roll of rice sluiced with warm peanut butter, under sesame seeds and jelly drizzle. Out on Metairie Road, however, it feels like a reward for the kids, provided they finish their seaweed salad and volcano roll.

Top Taco fest takes shape

Tacos have taken the food world by storm, finding a place on menus well beyond the traditional taqueria or Tex-Mex joint. Now New Orleans is getting its own taco festival.

Top Taco will debut this spring by the downtown waterfront, with an anticipated 40 restaurants serving their own spin on the street food favorite while the tequila flows and local Latin bands perform.

Top Taco is set for March 23 at the Riverwalk’s Spanish Plaza. Restaurants signed up thus far for Top Taco range from Mexican cantinas to sushi bars to modern bistro and Creole Italian eateries. They’ll be vying for awards and bringing different ideas for the flavors a taco can deliver.

“You’re starting to see tacos on everybody’s menu; it crosses a lot of lines now,” said festival director Shane Finkelstein. “I think this will be a lot of fun and broaden the appeal of the taco, and of tequila.”

Finkelstein runs the Elmwood restaurant Nacho Mama’s, and he said he’s long wanted to produce a taco festival. He found a format that’s proven successful with Top Taco Denver, which was started in 2014 and has grown each year.

The New Orleans version of Top Taco is a direct extension of that popular event, and Finkelstein is working with its producers to pull of his local version. A portion of the proceeds will benefit One Heart NOLA, a nonprofit that supports New Orleans’ foster children and families.

Finkelstein acknowledged the growing number of food festivals on the New Orleans calendar, which this year alone saw the debut of the Fried Chicken Fest and the Beignet Festival, both downtown in Lafayette Square. That’s one reason he’s steering Top Taco a bit differently, with the Spanish Plaza venue and a pay-one-price ticket. These will start at $65, with food and drink included. For details, see toptaconola.com.

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