

Peruvian-Japanese fusion done right

BITES

BY NICHOLAS GILL

Is Dondoh a Peruvian robatayaki (Japanese barbecue restaurant) or a Japanese parrilla (Latin steakhouse)? Does it matter, when the food is this good?

With Nikkei restaurants — specialists in melding Peruvian and Japanese ingredients and techniques over the past century — becoming an increasingly integral piece of the culinary scene in Lima, a Japanese-style meat restaurant with touches of Peru does not seem particularly out of place. The cuisine is a natural fusion that extends beyond just putting both ceviche and sushi on a menu. (Dondoh has neither, by the way.)

The restaurant is a collaboration of Renzo Garibaldi, who rose to fame with Osso, his butcher shop and restaurant that serves 300-day aged beef and all-meat degustation menus, and the chef Ciro Watanabe and the Osaka group, which has a chain of Nikkei restaurants around South America. The result is more Japanese than Peruvian, and there doesn't seem to be a concentrated effort to force local flavors into the dishes. Rather, subtle Peruvian touches are



DONDOH

Grilled avocado with slow-cooked egg and garlic and almond chimichurri at Dondoh.

found throughout Dondoh, like the *aji limo* spicing up the edamame or a sprig of *culantro* in the *gyoza*.

Inside Dondoh, which opened in December in the San Isidro district of Lima, hundreds of wooden *ema* prayer tablets hang above the bar, which is stocked with *soju* and *sake*. A stone divider separates the dark wood interiors of the central dining room from the open kitchen, where cooks place beef and

pork on *robata* grills fired with charcoal.

"The first time I saw one was in the Korin store in New York, and I immediately bought it," Mr. Garibaldi said, referring to the grills. "We used it at Osso for *anticuchos*, and I experimented with it in my house for barbecues." At Dondoh, they are used for cooking *shoyu-glazed* rib eyes and an *asado de tira* that is served with *kalbi* sauce and toasted sesame seeds.

Meat, however, makes up only a portion of the menu — more space is dedicated to small plates like you might find at an *izakaya*, such as a grilled avocado topped with a slow-cooked egg and a garlic and almond *chimichurri*, or *tako tempura*, tasty battered and fried chunks of octopus. There is even a riff on *pollo a la brasa*, Peru's ubiquitous *rotisserie* chicken, which instead gets smoked and spiced with *cardamom* and *shoyu*, plus a Black Angus burger with a *bao bun* dyed black with squid ink. Sides like rice and *udon* noodles are scooped out of cast iron pans *tableside*.

"We're trying to show that Nikkei food is more than fish," Mr. Garibaldi said. "It can be versatile and fire is a big part of it. We like the marriage between fire and meat, as well as between cultures."