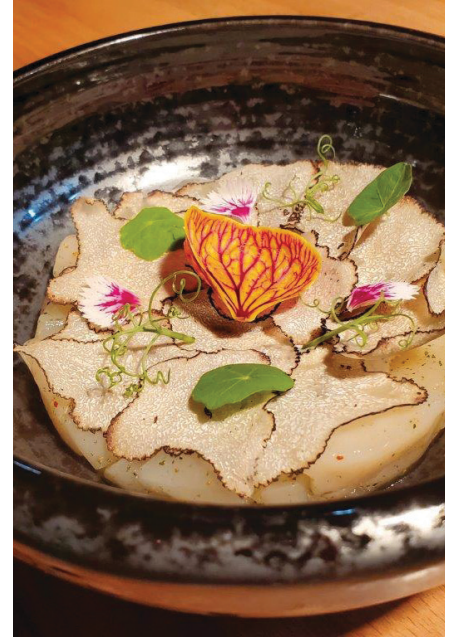




Bloom — Steamed buns/furikake/sweet kimchi butter. Add sunny-side egg with chili crunch and cilantro!



A painting of a lotus flower



Hokkaido Scallop Crudo (truffle aioli, roasted nori-truffle vinaigrette, citrus-bonito emulsion, seasonal truffle)

## TABLE TALK

# LOTUS A BROAD BRUSHSTROKE *of culinary genius*

## Like the lotus flower's mystery, Chef Honan teases our senses

story and photos by  
**LEIGH CORT**

I was immersed in the adventure of dining at Lotus long before I arrived. Open since late 2023, Lotus's reputation had been circulating through the grapevine with raves coming from regional chefs, visitors to St. Augustine that fortunately landed in this exquisite new restaurant and local foodie friends. I quickly realized that finding my own voice to describe Chef Barry Honan's distinctive style was going to be a challenge!

Although I didn't have to remove my shoes in this pint-size meticulous setting, being surrounded by natural woods and quietly designed features, we were immediately welcomed to feel that



Chef Barry Honan

we were in a Chef's discreet Japanese home even before being seated. Lotus is a breath of fresh air when you realize that a sought-after reservation guarantees an unforgettable treat.

St. Augustine has been considered an art Mecca for decades. With Barry's specialties as his canvas, he fits into this scene flawlessly. At Lotus, the emphasis

is on Chef's philosophy — the same story that is shared by the lotus flower: "Lotus symbolizes a profound integration of my thoughts, emotions, intuitions and desires. You have to break free from the mud to bloom into beauty."

Without question, the restaurant is better enjoyed if you know why it was created.

Arrive prepared to enjoy reading the menu; bring a culinary dictionary or use your cell phone to translate the descriptive dishes. There are many ingredients you'll want to investigate. It will assist you in making dining selections.

There is a modest curated list of wine and beer — and for saké fans, The Drunken Whale is a perfect small bottle of warm embracing nearly traditional sake. You'll be introduced to a parade of Chef's dishes that unfold with more food than seems possible for today's cost! Lotus is a restaurant that cares about educating you, especially on

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## LOTUS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 29

your first visit. All servers are brilliantly capable of imparting the exact descriptions so that you can navigate Chef's lavish culinary voyage.

One amazement that solidified my respect for Chef Honan upon arrival was when, in the middle of a busy dinner night, he acknowledged his team of chefs with appreciation for their work. With an open kitchen for all guests to view and hear the quiet, detailed work that was taking place, it was superb to watch Chef and his crew in action. Finally, when you taste the complex shareables or seasonal ramen entrees, the entire experience seems beautifully orchestrated and worth the wait.

A glimpse into Lotus' inventive dinner menu integrates modern Japanese cuisine with French techniques. Start with fresh water poured into a lovely bamboo goblet, settle the lovely black linen napkin on your lap and begin with the Hokkaido Scallop Crudo (truffle aioli, roasted nori-truffle vinaigrette, citrus-bonito emulsion, seasonal truffle). Taste the complex hints of spice, ethereal slices and a dish worth savoring. You



Bamboo Lotus cups

may think every dish is almost too gorgeous to eat. But you must ease into the vibe of beautiful food that masterfully unfolds before your eyes.

As origami is the art of folding paper into beautiful intricate shapes, Chef Honan's food reminds me of his magical journey of food — like paper that is considered a symbol of elegance and creativity. He pushes the limits of his imagination for guests to enjoy his creations as people have perfected the ancient art of origami for centuries.

The ramen entrees bring a lovely touch when with every course you receive a change of silverware and bowls.

The “Spicy Tan Tan” is a highlight of Sesame Sichuan-coconut broth, three-month aged white miso from Kyoto, spicy ground pork, toasted sesame, green onion, chili oil, ajitama! Equally delightful “Garlic Noodle Mazemen” is worth a look with blue crab/koji-butter, ajitama, cilantro, scallion, toasted sesame, fried garlic, togarashi.

With an illustrious career making his way through elite kitchens (including Le Bernardin in NYC, Thomas Keller's Per Se and The French Laundry), we're fortunate that Chef Honan chose to bring his lovely innovation to St. Augustine. His restaurant is a “creative obsession” filled with delightful surprise and artistry.

Even his words fill you with amazement as he states, “I navigate the delicate balance between finding myself and losing myself, unveiling a culinary journey that resonates with the essence of human connection and self-discovery.”

Lotus is so much more than an elevated ramen concept. It's where you can lose yourself in the moment and surrender to Chef Barry Honan's nightly innovations that expose your culinary fantasy to his broad brushstroke of genius!

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