

# 'Blackanese' sushi for Vusi Kunene

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Kenny Kunene sparked a trend among moneyed blacks who eat sushi and puff Cuban cigars with his extravagant parties. At these parties, men eat sushi off the bodies of skimpily clad models. Imagine our curiosity when we heard of a restaurant called Blackanese, owned by entrepreneur Vusi Kunene.

We wondered if the restaurateur was in any way related to the flamboyant sushi king.

The sushi and wine restaurant is situated at the Main Change area of the trendy Maboneng Precinct in eastern Johannesburg.

Between the array of shops and eateries at Kruger Street lies the small and intimate sushi and wine bar.

A staircase leads you into the Japanese-inspired décor. A small passage leads you to the bar as a waiter gives you a black and red menu.

We order a sushi platter for two at R150. Within a few minutes a dish of that morning's seafood is placed before us.

Kunene sets the record straight and explains that he is in no way associated with Kenny, the well-known king of *Izikhothane*, but adds that it has been good for his business.

"The sushi market is predominately white, but we have had many black people show interest in our business," he says

Durban-born Kunene says he had his first taste of the hospitality industry when he was 18 years old.

"I wanted to study photography but because I had no funds for the expensive course, I got a job at an eatery called *Traveller's Shebeen*," he says.

Kunene later became a waiter at a number of fine dining places in Durban such as *Pepenero*, *Sevruga* and *Baobab*.

"These Japanese guys were always working in the kitchens and I was fascinated watching them," he says.

Kunene's urge to learn the art of sushi-making grew. He quit his job to pursue his passion for Japanese food.

"The Japanese guys were not keen to share their skills. I went to work at several other restaurants while searching for

someone to train me," he says.

Kunene's first foray into the business was running a mobile bar which travelled to Pretoria, Durban and Johannesburg. While in Johannesburg, a customer suggested that he should try a new business idea at the weekend food markets.

"I convinced a few of my sushi-making friends to give up a few hours of their weekend mornings to help me prepare food for the Sunday *Market on Main*," Kunene says.

He started with a small number of customers which quickly grew into long queues of sushi-lovers.

Kunene and his friends targeted other weekend markets and exhibitions, including the Saturday neighbourhood markets, *Africa Bike Week* and the *Soweto Wine Fair*, to grow their business.

"One day we were at a market when some Japanese customers bought our food. One customer came back and said 'Your sushi is quite impressive, where in Japan are you from?'" he says.

Kunene says he responded: "I am not from Japan, I'm actually Blackanese."

The remark led to him opening *Blackanese*.

When Kunene met Maboneng developer Jonathan Liebmann earlier this year, his search for a permanent place was over. The restaurant opened in July this year. His friend Sandile Ntombela quit his job and joined him as the executive chef.

The two friends host Saturday afternoon sushi classes and offer catering services to corporates and house party functions.

"We also cater to people who don't like fish by offering Asian-inspired chicken or beef dishes.

"We are going to introduce more African dishes like biltong sushi, deep fried sushi and chicken sushi," Kunene says.

Source: *Sowetan* via I-Net Bridge

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