

By Maggie Hradecky

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## My Last Bite: Great taste, relaxing atmosphere 'rolled' into one Beloit restaurant

**Name:** Zen Sushi

**Address:** 430 E. Grand Ave., Beloit, Wisconsin

**Phone/website:** 608-299-8888; [zensushibeloit.com](http://zensushibeloit.com)

**Owner:** Brian Park and Peter Hur

**Hours:** 11 a.m. to 2 p.m., lunch, Monday-Saturday; 4 to 10 p.m., dinner, Monday-Saturday; 4 to 9 p.m. Sunday

**About:** Zen Sushi opened in September in the Phoenix Building in downtown Beloit. The building, which has apartments and retail stores, is owned by Diane Hendricks of [ABC Supply](#) and [Hendricks Commercial Properties](#). The idea for a downtown sushi restaurant came from a survey of residents done more than a year ago. Park, who owns several restaurants around Milwaukee and Chicago, has catered for Diane Hendricks for years and welcomed the opportunity. Hendricks was recently named [America's Richest Self-Made Woman](#) by *Forbes* magazine.



Zen Sushi, 430 E. Grand Ave., Beloit, Wisconsin, is located in the Phoenix Building, next to Lucy's #7 Burger Bar. MAGGIE HRADECKY/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER/RRSTAR.COM

**Most popular items:** Not much else stands out at a sushi restaurant, except sushi. And if you love it, Zen is your place to go. With nearly 50 different kinds of sushi and sashimi, this restaurant won't let you leave hungry. Some of the more popular items are on Zen's Classic House Roll list and most feature at least eight pieces — California roll (\$5.95), which includes crab, cucumber and avocado; shrimp tempura (\$7.95), shrimp tempura, cucumber, avocado and spicy mayonnaise; and spicy tuna (\$7.95), which has cucumber and scallions.

People also gravitate toward Zen's Signature Rolls, which include the Zen Roll (\$14.95 for five pieces), which is made with mame-nori (soy wrappers), asparagus, cream cheese, spicy tuna tartare, crab meat and spicy aioli; the Dragon (\$13.95 for five pieces), featuring shrimp tempura, cucumber, barbecued eel, avocado and eel sauce; and the ABC Roll (\$16.95 for five pieces), filled with crab meat, cucumber, cream cheese, topped with albacore and big-eye tuna, tataki sauce and served over flames.

If you don't like sushi, you still have plenty to choose from on the menu. There are rice and noodle dishes (\$9.95 to \$18.95), a New York strip steak (\$21.95), duck breast (\$23.95) and chicken teriyaki (\$15.95).

**We ate:** My son Jack and his girlfriend, Savannah, joined me for dinner on a Tuesday night before taking in a show at Starlight Theatre. Jack is a sushi fanatic and happily agreed to be a taste tester.

We called in a reservation (although reservations aren't necessary) for 6:15 p.m. and arrived around 6 p.m. The restaurant was already hopping. Only a handful of tables were unoccupied — a big surprise for early in the week.

We started with a heaping order of edamame (\$3.95) from the appetizer menu. These steamed, immature soybeans were seasoned with salt and perfect. They were tasty, warm and soft, yet still had a bit of a snap as you bit down on the soybeans.

For our main courses, we chose several different items from the menu and agreed to share. The first selections were the spicy tuna and spider roll (\$8.95 for five pieces) off the Classic House Roll portion of the menu. I adored the spicy tuna rolls, which include cucumber, scallions and chili oil. The tuna rolls were bite-size and gave you a surge of spiciness after a few seconds in your mouth. I'm sure the cucumber and scallions were there to assuage the fire on your taste buds, and they did their job. The spider rolls were much bigger and wrapped in soy wrappers. They include soft-shell crab, cucumber, avocado and spicy aioli — which is mayonnaise-flavored with garlic. These didn't have the "bite" that the spicy tuna rolls had, but still were full of flavor and fresh ingredients.

Savannah, who is allergic to avocados, had a trickier time selecting sushi, as many of the items include the nutty-flavored fruit. She settled on the Angry Bird roll (\$5.95 for eight pieces), which is made with chicken tempura, asparagus, lettuce and teriyaki sauce. These rolls were on the sweeter side, thanks to the teriyaki sauce and chicken tempura. Savannah and I really enjoyed them and thought the sweetness hid the bitterness of the asparagus. In fact, I couldn't taste the vegetable in most of my bites. Jack said all he could taste was the asparagus.

My son opted for one of the restaurant's signature rolls, the Red Dragon (\$18.95 for eight pieces), which is made with soft-shell crab, avocado, spicy mayonnaise, and topped with spicy tuna and serrano peppers. Jack thought the peppers trumped the rest of the ingredients. But since he devoured every roll, it is safe to say he still loved the taste of these larger rolls.

I ordered — over-ordered, to be exact — the Firecracker (\$8.95 for six pieces). These are made with spicy (notice a theme going here?) crab, cream cheese and jalapenos. These rolls were not as spicy as the tuna rolls — I would call them "zesty" — but had a nice smooth, creamy texture and were definitely filling. I was so stuffed by the time the check got there, I needed a good stroll. There are a lot of shops to explore in downtown Beloit.

**"Ahh" factor:** The restaurant is clean and not over-decorated. I loved the "zen" feel of the room.

**"Hmm" moment:** Our waitress was very sweet, but only checked in with us once before bringing our check. I know it was busy, so I'm sure she was

distracted. But, we were in a time crunch and could only stay about an hour. Carryout is available — something to keep in mind for future orders, since I definitely will be back.

**Next time:** I will stop in for lunch and try one of Zen's combos, which lets you pick two sushi items and either a bowl of soup or a salad.

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