

RESTAURANTS



RESTAURANT OPENINGS

First Look at Tim Maslow’s Whaling in Oklahoma

The South End scores a funky Japanese *izakaya* from a hotshot chef this week.

by **SCOTT KEARNAN** • 8/22/2018, 3:13 p.m.



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Whaling in Oklahoma opens this week. / Photo by Toan Trinh

Prepare for *karaage*, kombucha cocktails, and a side of karaoke. Whaling in Oklahoma, a much-awaited South End restaurant that marks a return to top billing for celebrated chef Tim Maslow, opens for dinner on Thursday, August 23.

The Japanese *izakaya*-inspired joint with an irreverent name—a reference to a nonsensical, purported whaling ban in the landlocked Sooner State—is accompanied by orca-sized anticipation: Chef-owner Maslow’s work at the now-shuttered spots Strip-T’s and Ribelle earned him local acclaim and national nods, including a 2015 “Best New Chefs” designation from *Food & Wine* that solidified a certain It-chef status before an intervening period of professional tumult.

Whaling in Oklahoma, which inhabits the South End spaces that previously housed Tremont 647 and its sibling cocktail bar, Sister Sorel, lets Maslow draw on his experience as an alum of David Chang’s Momofuku in NYC. According to a statement from the team, Whaling will serve up an array of playful riffs on yakitori (grilled skewers), tempura, *karaage* (fried chicken), miso soup (with “house-made regional miso”) and “experimental sushi” from an open kitchen with a custom-built, charcoal-fueled *binchō-tan* grill. You’ll also find large-format dishes and the “OK SET,” a tasting-style lineup of chef’s-choice bar snacks offered at \$30 per person. Dessert includes a *wagashi* menu of Japanese sweets, and Maslow has tapped for day-to-day kitchen operations chef Matthew Hummel, a Ribelle vet.

Sousa Design, the team behind stylish hits like Waypoint and the [just-opened Fool's Errand](#), helmed the interior's makeover. One side of the 105-seat, patio-equipped restaurant plays it pretty: Think sky blue hues and earth tones, river stone tiles, a fanciful mural from Maslow's artist-friend Jason Vivona, and *ikebana* flower arrangements. The other room takes cues from Hokkaido hunting lodges, with plenty of handsome woods, taxidermy and buffalo flannel. There, a private dining room will also double as a karaoke destination.

Each room has its own bar emphasizing Japanese beers, sake, white wines and whiskeys, plus a rare Suntory Toki high ball machine with a selection of flavors. Some of the kicky cocktails, like the shiso kombucha vesper, will invoke an in-house fermentation program overseen by Colin Mason, yet another teammate tapped from the Ribelle days.

Maslow has kept a lower profile since that acclaimed restaurant's 2016 closing, passing through kitchens at Fenway's Tiger Mama and the South End's MIDA, consulting on restaurant projects in Maine, and focusing on new fatherhood while digesting a time of some difficulty. "Being in the limelight sucks," he told the [Boston Herald](#) in June, reflecting on reports of financial struggles at Ribelle, an arrest for marijuana possession (the charges were dismissed) and a reputation as a talented but fiery toque. These were, he said, humbling learning experiences. Whaling is a chance to put them in practice without tempering his earlier ambitions.

"Life smacks you around, and it teaches everyone maturity," said Maslow in June. "It's just a matter of whether you choose to listen to it."

Whaling in Oklahoma will open Mondays through Wednesdays from 5 p.m.-midnight; Thursdays through Saturdays from 5 p.m.-1 a.m.; and Sundays from 4 p.m.-midnight. Weekend brunch is expected to launch next month.

647 Tremont St., South End, 617-266-4600, [whalinginoklahoma.com](#).

Whaling in Oklahoma fills the footprint of the late Tremont 647 and Sister Sorel. / Photo by Toan Trinh

The lounge at Whaling in Oklahoma is inspired by a Hokkaido-style hunting lodge. / Photo by Toan Trinh

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