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Sustainable sushi and other patently obvious (but brilliant) ideas from Niko in Manhattan

BY SUZANNE WEINSTOCK
PHOTOGRAPHY EDWIN TZE

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Look carefully at the menu at Niko, a downtown Manhattan sushi eatery that's the latest offering from restaurateur Cobi Levy, and you'll find the following notation:

Niko works with the Marine Stewardship Council and the Monterey Bay Aquarium, prioritizing sustainability and an environmentally sound approach to sourcing. For those choices which are outside of this program, we have added a "". If you'd like more information, please ask.*

The intent is to capture diners' attention without alienating them. "If they choose to care, they can," Levy points out. "We think that, given the opportunity, people will decide what they want to be involved in and what they don't."

Responsible sourcing was an obvious choice for Levy, who grew up in the relatively eco-conscious city of San Francisco. Instead of mercury-laden, endangered bluefin tuna, Levy and sushi chef Hiro Sawatari substitute farm-raised Kindai tuna. Menus are seasonal. Ingredients are sourced locally. Meat and chicken are free-range. Natural sodas have replaced chemical ones. "One thing that never made sense to me is, if you're organic but people can order a Diet Coke, what does that mean?" he adds.

Levy believes that this level of responsibility is really just the bare minimum. He's not militant about the number of miles vegetables may travel, but he draws the line at importing water because New York springs are just as good. It's the easy fixes that would make a huge difference, Levy maintains, if everyone simply cared enough to reach for the low-hanging fruit.

"One of the great misconceptions about going local is that it's something new. Before globalization, all the great chefs went to the market, found the freshest ingredients and used them," he points out. Enhanced fruits and steroid-pumped frozen chicken weren't an option. "There's nothing new or novel or brilliant about Niko's approach. It's just the way life should be."

For more on sustainable sushi, Levy recommends [Sustainable Sushi: A Guide to Saving the Oceans One Bite at a Time](#), by Casson Trenor and the [Seafood Watch App](#) with up-to date recommendations for ocean-friendly seafood and sushi.



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