

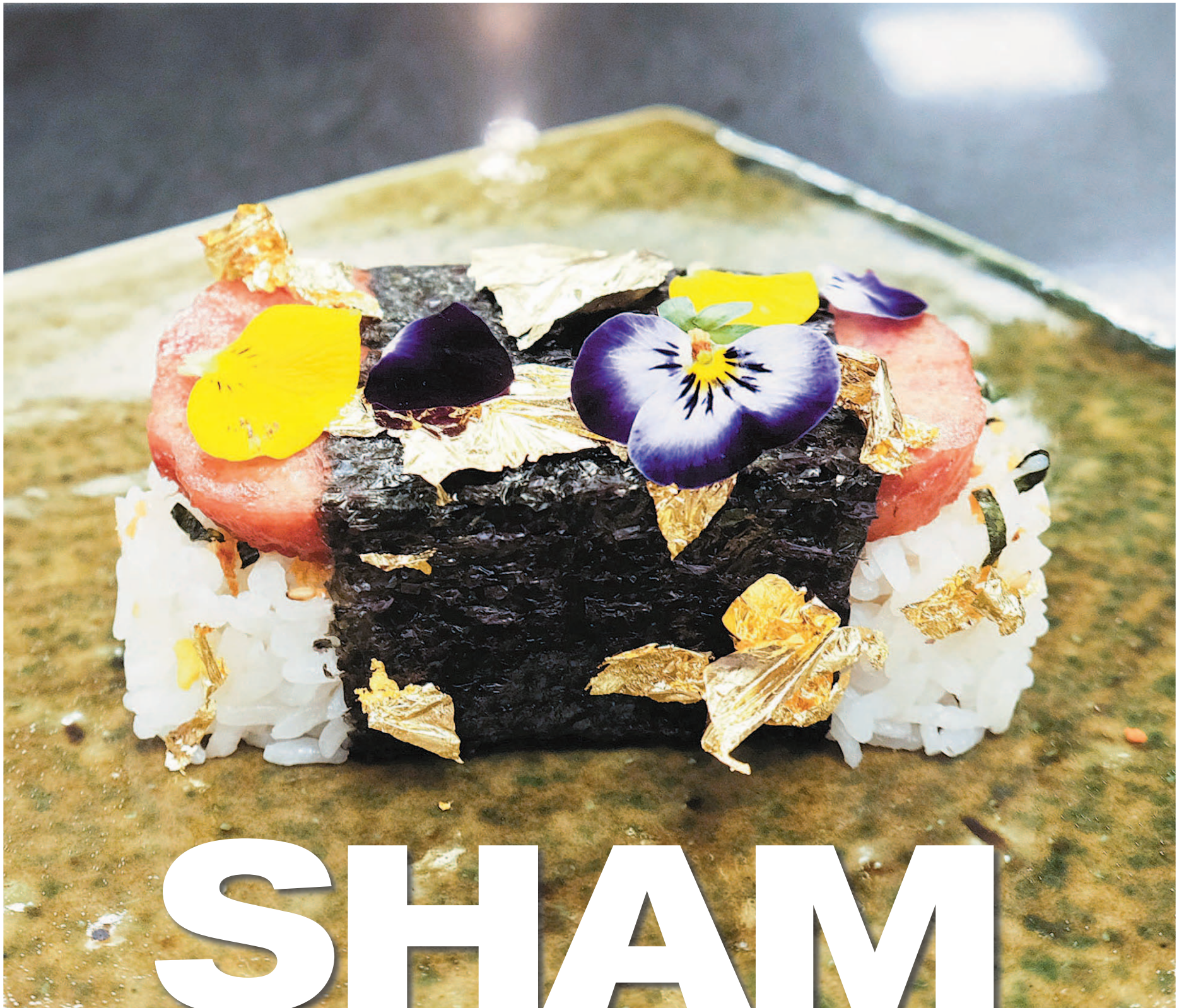
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SIGNS OF HAWAIIAN LIFE

A roundup of reader photos who captured reminders of home while on the road >> D8

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SHAM SPAM

Prettified and de-porkified, Hawaii's favorite musubi is adapted for halal fine dining

Story and photos by Kiki Aranita
Special to the Star-Advertiser

BAHRAIN >>

My day begins with a Kona coffee espresso and a valiant replication of poke made with exquisitely cooked and cubed beets that mimic ruby red ahi. Given that I co-own and operate a restaurant in Philadelphia called Poi Dog, which serves fresh ahi poke, plate lunches and musubi to a solid customer base comprised of many homesick Hawaii people, there is nothing unusual about my meal. I consistently gravitate toward foods that remind me of Hawaii.

I grew up on Oahu, where my father's side of the family lives. Every day in Philadelphia, I am surrounded by Hawaiian ingredients, all of which abate my own homesickness. But today, I'm seated in the lounge of the Four Seasons Hotel Bahrain Bay, in this small island nation in the Arabian Gulf.

I am here to serve a version of Spam musubi at re/Asian Cuisine, a Wolfgang Puck restaurant in the Four Seasons, as part of a collaboration dinner headlined by executive chef Brian Becher and Ari Miller, chef and owner of Musi in Philadelphia. Re/Asian chef Luke Omarzu and pastry chef Fourkou Abderrazik are also working on a menu that Rumena Martin, the as-



Chefs Luke Omarzu and Ari Miller get ready to slice into their pork-free "Sham," molded in Spam cans. At top, a gold leaf and flower-decorated Sham musubi, since this is the Four Seasons Bahrain Bay, after all.

sistant restaurant director, declares, "The funkier menu I've seen so far."

Meat such as beef, lamb and duck imported into Bahrain must be halal certified, or prepared according to Muslim law. Imported pork is exempt because it is obviously "haram," or forbidden. Bah-

rain has no local pork.

"You can order pork from a vendor or buy it from certain supermarkets. There's a 'no-no section' at these supermarkets with Pop-Tarts, Lucky Charms, Vienna sausage and Spam. It's essentially the American section," Becher explains.

Omarzu adds, "Bahrain has a large Filipino population and other cultures that eat pork."

The Four Seasons only serves halal meat and no pork, so the kitchen had to figure out a Spam substitute. Their version combines chicken thigh, wagyu beef and chicken fat. The mixture is seasoned with white pepper, garlic, salt, sugar and paprika, then placed into molds to be poached and, finally, cooled in an ice bath. In this case, the molds are emptied and cleaned Spam cans.

"The biggest challenge was getting the mixture to bind properly, since we're using rendered chicken fat, not pork fat. These don't have the same texture," Omarzu said. "You have to get those molecules to bind properly. It took a lot of trial and error."

The working title is "Sham."

MINNESOTAN Omarzu lived from 2004 to 2008 in Haleiwa while working as a line cook at Turtle Bay Resort. "I grew up in a small town and wanted the biggest change that I could find. So I moved to Hawaii, the farthest away I could think of. I get there and everyone is eating Spam from Minnesota," he said.

"It's hilarious that Spam is made

Please see **MUSUBI, D6**

