

## Jiro Dreams of Sushi

This is the story of a culinary obsessive: it concerns 85 year-old Jiro Ono, who is perhaps the world's greatest sushi chef. He cultivates his obsession—perhaps more kindly called his lifework—in the Sukiyabashi Jiro, a 10-seat, sushi-only restaurant located in a subway station in Tokyo's Ginza section. While telling his story might seem to be thin gruel for a feature-length documentary, American director David Gelb, in his feature film debut, has made what turns out to be a fascinating story, indeed, a meditation on exquisite food and the man who makes it.

Despite its modest setting, Jiro's restaurant is the first of its kind to be awarded a prestigious "three-star" Michelin review, and sushi lovers from around the world come to taste his delicacies, willing to make reservations months in advance and also pay serious money (30,000 yen—about \$350-- for a 20-piece meal).

Jiro is seemingly possessed by making the classic Japanese cuisine, and while, as a master *shokunin*, he has been crafting sushi for most of his long life, he sees himself still striving for perfection. As he is quoted in the film "You have to fall in love with your job. You must dedicate your life to mastering your skill." He definitely does, as it shows him working from dawn to night, rarely taking holidays, painstakingly training his employees, and fastidiously crafting the presentation of each sushi piece—placed one at a time on a lacquered pad.

Jiro doesn't seem to have a family life (we never see his home or his wife), but he does have two sons who feature in the film. His eldest son Yoshikazu, the probable heir to Jiro's legacy, has apprenticed and worked with his father for decades, yet still wonders, at 50, whether he will ever measure up. A second son, Takashi, was also meticulously trained by Jiro, but because he is not first in line to inherit his father's restaurant (and perhaps also feeling the pinch of a supremely demanding father), he has opened his own sushi place elsewhere in Tokyo. Supreme dedication, yes, obsession, has its price. Jiro admits at one point in the film: "I wasn't much of a father."

Director Gelb, who got to know Japan and Tokyo through frequent family trips, had long admired sushi and was led to Jiro's place during a tour of that city's great sushi havens by the noted Japanese food critic Yamamoto, who also appears as a talking head in the film, praising the work of Jiro. Gelb then spent many weeks over two years gathering footage of Sukiyabashi Jiro and its chef. What he wanted to achieve, Gelb has said, is to "show people that sushi is so much more than putting fish on rice. Jiro has created an art form." And it is one you can see beautifully displayed in "Jiro Dreams of Sushi." It will, perhaps for a day or two, make you dream of it also.

*(The film runs 81 minutes and is rated PG: in Japanese with English subtitles)*

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