

## Best Small Plates: An evening of rarefied bites (2007)

### Hanazen

87 Orinda Way, Orinda, CA

925-254-3611

[MyHanazen.com](http://MyHanazen.com)

### Readers' Choice: Cesar

Most nights, Hanazen is a sleepy sushi joint with better-than-average nigiri. But once a month, husband-and-wife owners Kenji and Coco Horikawa put on a special multicourse dinner that pairs premium sakes with small portions of food in Japan's *kaiseki* tradition. At a recent dinner the five courses included warm black cod with an ethereal miso sauce, a salad of delicate young okra slices, slabs of foie-gras-like monkfish liver topped with black *shoyu tobiko*, and an amazing deep-fried halibut roulade that contained asparagus and anise-scented shiso leaves. Seating is limited to sixteen, and meals can run well beyond three hours. Since Coco never lets your glass sit empty, a night of brilliant tastes can go all foggy next morning. The price tag is significant (\$80 per person), and you can get on the invite list only if you've dined at the sushi bar and signed the guestbook. But *kaiseki nirvana* is worthy of your patience.