

DON'T TRY THIS AT HOME

I know we've all felt the pinch of inflation over the last few years. When eating out, I find myself ordering half as much, yet everything costs twice as much as it used to. Sadly one of my favorite dishes at our local sushi restaurant has gone over the top. \$18 for one piece of uni and quail egg sushi. Granted, for me it's one of the best bites on earth, but it does seem a little steep. So I decided to try my hand at making it on my own.

I'm always trying to rationalize buying extravagant things. A tray of uni (sea urchin) from our local fish store is \$50. But, that will make at least 12 pieces of uni sushi. So, had I eaten 12 pieces at my local sushi bar, I would have paid \$216. So \$50 seems like a bargain. (You see how my mind works?)

Quail eggs, sushi rice and nori are relatively reasonably priced, just good luck finding them when you need them. I had noticed my local gourmet shop was carrying quail eggs, so I didn't think to buy them until I needed them and of course, when I did, they were out. So I had to schlep to their sister store a half-mile away. Of course, I live in a trendy neighborhood in Brooklyn that of course would have quail eggs. I do realize that outside of my NY bubble, that might not be the case, so plan ahead.

Back home with all the ingredients, it was time to give it a go. I have great respect for sushi chefs and know that it takes years of practice to make it correctly. I had no illusions that mine would look as appealing as theirs, but I had hoped that at least it would taste as good. I have my trusty sushi mat, my Japanese rice cooker, some pre-cut nori. How hard could this be?

I've been studying how our local sushi chef creates his delectable bites for over thirty years. So why can't I

remember if he molds the rice first and rolls the nori around it or if he makes the nori circle and then adds the rice into it. Oh boy. I try both ways, but the rice is still so hot I can't really mold it tightly. Eventually I make some semblance of a base with my goal that it doesn't collapse. I add in a few pieces of uni on top. Ok, so far, it's holding. Now I need to separate the quail egg yolk from the whites. Our sushi chef just opens the egg in his hand and lets the whites drip out under his fingers. It sort of works, but there's still too much white left as I gently plop the yolk next to the uni.

Now for the true test—tasting it. Normally this dish transports me to another universe. The unctuous taste of the uni paired with the creaminess of the quail egg is so sublime, I usually sigh when eating it. So, there's a high bar I'm hoping to reach. I raise the first piece to my mouth, and take it in whole as I gently bite down for the taste explosion—and-nothing. It's not that it's bad, it's just not anywhere near as good as I had hoped. First of all, the rice isn't right. I did use sushi rice, but it probably wasn't as high a grade as it needed to be and I didn't have the right vinegar seasoning. It was way too bland. The nori was a little soggy because I don't have the experienced touch. The uni was good, but not as great as it could have been. Although I spent \$50 on the tray, one could pay up to \$150 for superior quality uni. And lastly, there was too much of the whites from the quail egg muddying up the flavor.

So, now I have a half tray of of uni and six quail eggs left and nothing to do with them. Wait a minute—do I smell a pasta dish coming on?