



Nicolaus Balla
Executive Chef
O Izakaya Lounge

Nicolaus Balla, executive chef at O Izakaya Lounge at the Hotel Kabuki in San Francisco, is a graduate of the prestigious Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York. Balla, who developed a menu of Japanese-style shared plates, or *izakaya*, for O, nurtured his love for Japanese cuisine at a young age, cooking with his mother's nori, soy sauce and miso, and favoring sushi rolls over hamburgers as a high school student in rural Michigan. His father's long-term girlfriend, a native of Japan, has also served as a valued influence, acting as a cultural liaison and providing Balla with critiques and advice on his Japanese cooking endeavors.

After graduating from culinary school, Balla moved to San Francisco and served as a line cook at Ozumo, the highly regarded and critically acclaimed contemporary Japanese restaurant. He then accepted a line-cook position at Americano Restaurant at Joie de Vivre's acclaimed Hotel Vitale, where he honed his craft and rose to the rank of sous chef.

Balla's travels to Japan and brief sojourn in Hungary have greatly influenced his culinary sensibilities. Balla's cooking philosophy is based on serving the freshest seasonal products available, and to do so in ways that are conducive to sharing. A devout "local-vore," Balla loves the bounty of fresh, seasonal produce that a culinary life in San Francisco affords him. He lives in the vibrant Mission District of San Francisco.