

[Full Site](#)[Back](#)

Photos by Jessica Sayuri Boissy
RESTAURANT REVIEW

Swine and dine at HyLife Pork TABLE

By Jessica Sayuri Boissy

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Recommend 25

TOKYO —

From the plates to the ceiling, it is “all-pork everything” at HyLife Pork TABLE, Daikanyama’s newest restaurant, which opened in September.

The versatile dishes are sourced from a variety of pigs bred and cultivated in Canada—hence, the fitting name “HyLife Pork” for this “swine and dine” eatery. However, it’s a bold move to make a predominantly all-pork menu; that is, unless you are pretty darn confident in your product.

In HyLife’s case, this translates to high-quality pork that is more than just hype. Coming straight from Manitoba, Canada’s third largest pork-producing province, HyLife Pork TABLE roasts, smokes, and pan-sears every imaginable pork staple to

tasty perfection. The name “HyLife” alludes not to the “high life” of lavishness, but rather to the little luxuries that, as its motto goes: “Mak[e] an ordinary day, eh ‘SUTEKI’ day.”

Here’s how the restaurant’s celebrated centerpiece goes from a culinary blank canvas to various flavor-enhanced masterpieces, ranging from marinated pork loin steak to BBQ baby back ribs. Be forewarned: Some dishes are so finger-lickin’ good that you may be tempted to abandon all table manners — possibly even tap into your “inner piglet” and let out a squeal of delight.

Dinner commenced with drinks and two pieces of the Canadian “otsumami” (Japanese tapas), bite-sized ribs seasoned with a special dry rub (¥200 per piece). In line with the culinary concept, the starters were served on custom-made wooden pig plates.

This attention to detail was present even after eyeing the extensive drink menu. With selections ranging from Canadian craft beer to wine and whiskey, you know that beverages were not an afterthought when HyLife was perfecting its niche menu. I opted for a signature cocktail called “HyLife Ice Wine” (¥1,000), a concoction of sweet wine aromatically flavored with apricot, peach, and honey nicely balanced by club soda. My dining companion went for the non-alcoholic “Maple Water” (¥600), a maple sap drink that refreshingly cleansed the palate and, fortunately, wasn’t syrupy-sweet.

Following our server’s suggestion, we ordered the “Seasonal Grilled ‘Miura’ Vegetables” (¥1,300) as our appetizer. Fully aware that our night would encompass “pigging out” on pork classics, the colorful assortment of grilled vegetables was a much-welcomed addition to our tabletop. A quick scan of the rustic dish revealed robust carrots, turnips, snappy green beans and tangy banana peppers. This medley of freshly-picked, farm-to-table produce is finished off with a drizzle of olive oil and a dash of salt—so simple, yet so delicious.

For our main entrées, we settled upon three of the four “HyLife Specials” that all feature herb-fed “Sangenton” pork, a crossbred of three pig breeds heralded for their natural melt-in-your-mouth fat content.

The “Smoked Roast Pork” (100 grams for ¥800) was thinly sliced and showcased the blushing meat encrusted in a layer of golden brown skin. The slow-smoked succulent swine was elevated with a rich red wine sauce that accentuated its glossy sheen.

Our unanimous favorite was the “Thick Cut Grilled Pork Loin Steak” (200 grams for ¥1,500) that was perfectly charred on the outside but still retained a rosy hue

on the inside. Dressed simply with seasonings found in any common spice cabinet, the dish hit a high note with both pure and permeated flavors. And the meat? Tender, juicy, lip-smackin' good. The side of diced tomatoes and lemon slices added a final touch of lightness to the palate-pleasing pork loin steak. A definite repeat for dinner.

The "BBQ Baby Back Ribs" (5 pieces for ¥1,500) had plenty of down-home flavor that was on par with HyLife's get-down, good-time ambiance: a critical component for a well-rounded dining experience. Whether it's date night or an evening out with friends, the sticky glazed ribs are best eaten with hands. Don't worry about minding your manners, as digging in manually is expected, if not encouraged.

When it came time for dessert, we couldn't help but wonder...would pork be subtly sneaked into the rhubarb tart and tiramisu? The answer, to our relief, was no. Nevertheless, a savory-sweet flavor combination comes full circle in the "Gorgonzola Cheesecake" paired with wild blueberry sauce (¥700). Every crisp, buttery bite of the "Rhubarb Crumble Tart" (¥700) was also comfort food at its best, and the rhubarb was a tasteful nod to its Canadian roots.

Likewise, in keeping with the Canadian flair, the menu features specialties like HyLife's rendition of "poutine" (¥900), homestyle fries topped with sour cream and a red wine reduction. Hands down, a heightened incarnation of this delicious "hot mess."

Maybe there can be too much of a good thing. In recent years, pork has become the poster child for excessively rich cuisine—particularly, in terms of taste. However, judging by the looks of HyLife Pork TABLE, the meat of the moment has trotted onto the Japanese dinner table, leaving trot marks on our taste buds and taking ahold of our appetite.

In summary, HyLife proves the presence of pork is like the Midas touch: at its best, everything it touches turns to gold.

HyLife Pork TABLE

Address: Mansard Bldg 2F, 10-1, Sarugakucho, Shibuya, Tokyo

Tel: 03-6452-5497

Open: Lunch (11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m./ L.O. 2:30 p.m.)/ Dinner (6 p.m. to 11 p.m./ L.O. 10 p.m.)

Closed: Irregular holidays

Access: 5-minute walk from Daikanyama Station

Website: <http://hylifepork.com/table/> (Japanese only)

Online reservation: <http://hylifepork.com/table/reservation/>

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