

EATER TRACKING

# Full Frontal Noodly: Ramen Suzukiya's Food Porn Window Display

Chef/owner Katsuaki Suzuki and son Cory tease East Enders with gorgeous shots of handmade ramen noodles, though the restaurant's opening status has been downgraded to "Hopefully by the end of the year."

by Adam H. Callaghan | [@AHCAllaghan](#) | Oct 14, 2014, 9:50am EDT

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Exterior of 229 Congress Street, Portland, with photos of Ramen Suzukiya dishes in the windows. | All photos: Adam H. Callaghan

If you've stopped into Otto Pizza's East End location recently, you might have noticed some classy noodle in a neighboring window. **Ramen Suzukiya**, under construction at [229 Congress Street](#), is flashing the goods that have the neighborhood salivating. They're real, and they're fabulous, confirms Cory Suzuki, son of owner and ramen-maker Katsuaki Suzuki.

"My dad did cook everything in the pictures," the younger Suzuki says with pride. He stands inside the narrow space that formerly held The Haberdashery, before an apartment fire drove the clothing store west to the Arts District. A contractor has just departed, and Cory is cautiously optimistic that construction will be simple. A bathroom is the biggest addition, while he'll handle many of the aesthetic details. The ground-floor location was a blank slate when the Suzukis got a hold of it, but Katsuaki quickly made it his own, using painter's tape to map out a life-sized floor plan.



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The bottom middle section will be where the bathroom extends to. Just above it on the left will be the recirculation hood. To the right, in the middle, will be the service counter.

"I can imagine it now," Katsuaki explains, holding his fingers up to his temples. "This is a great spot. It'll be a small shop, so it might not make as much money as another spot, but it means we can change quickly." This devotion to nimbleness drives another of Katsuaki's decisions, as well: "I want to make everything here so I can make changes quickly," he explains.

"I don't want to do New York City ramen or Tokyo ramen. I want to do Portland ramen, Maine ramen," the retired television producer insists. Cory clarifies that bigger restaurants use a huge machine to roll out massive quantities of dough at once, whereas his father will be making dough in a more old-fashioned manner, by hand, with only an Italian noodle maker for assistance.

The dough will use a mix of grain flours; Katsuaki says this is normal for ramen noodles. He estimates that his final product will comprise 30-50% Maine Grain Alliance flour, along with a portion of King Arthur flours. He'll offer thin, medium, and "fat" noodle sizes, cut to order so the customer can choose. It might seem daunting for this man alone to prepare by hand 100% of the ramen noodles the eatery expects to sell, but Katsuaki repeats one refrain with quiet determination: "It'll be a challenge, but I like it."

"I'd prefer a slow start, so I have time to learn it," the new restaurateur admits with a smile. He may get his wish; [originally hoping for an October opening](#), the father and son team has pushed the target back to December. Opening in a non-Old Port neighborhood in winter could mean a mellow beginning, but the Suzukis would like to connect with locals anyhow.

"I emailed you about our plans for local music and art, right?" Cory asks. "We're going to reserve a spot for musicians to play if they'd like, and at least one wall will be devoted to a rotating art display." His father would like to purchase bowls from local potters, and would be absolutely fine with having a variety of types, as long as they're similar sizes. "There are so many talented people here, I want to utilize that," he enthuses.

Seating will be limited and communal. Cory describes a cafe or coffee shop feel, with a long bar-like table in front of the large front windows, as well as a table or two along the side wall. Katsuaki thinks this will encourage customers to sit together, meet one another, and make friends.

They might be too busy chewing to chat, though. In addition to his lofty goal of making everything in house, Katsuaki has another challenge ahead of him: Because of the prohibitive cost of installing a vent hood, he'll be using a recirculation hood instead. For those of you keeping score at home, that means there will be no cooking grease, no cooking fat, no cooking oil. Nothing fried, whatsoever; the food will all be cooked using some kind of steam or sous vide.

Cory points out that in their long search for a suitable home for Ramen Suzukiya, they eyed 648 Congress Street. Because of restrictions, they wouldn't have been able to install a vent hood there, which is when the idea of a recirculation hood surfaced. Ultimately they had to scrap plans there because of power issues, but by that time Katsuaki had tested his recipes without grease and decided he liked the results.

His son, a farmer and an avowed butter fan, is quick to defend the choice. "I'm telling you, he cooked me the gyoza with water instead of butter - and I *like* butter - but it was good! It even had that crispiness that you want with something like that. I couldn't believe it myself!"



Assuming they can surmount all of these challenges, Cory even has further plans for his father's dough dexterity. He says the difference is stark between Katsuaki's homemade ramen and the instant noodles most people are familiar with. "There are only a couple of companies that sell most of the dried, instant ramen noodles in this country. I want to make homemade instant ramen noodles and sell them at retail." Kittery-based [Sonmat Foods](#), sister business to Anju Noodle Bar, is selling its kimchi and hot sauce at Whole Foods. Serious Eats' Food Lab [recently released a how-to](#) on just-add-hot-water instant noodles. The time could be right.

Small shop, big dreams. "It'll be a challenge, but I like it," Katsuaki repeats.

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