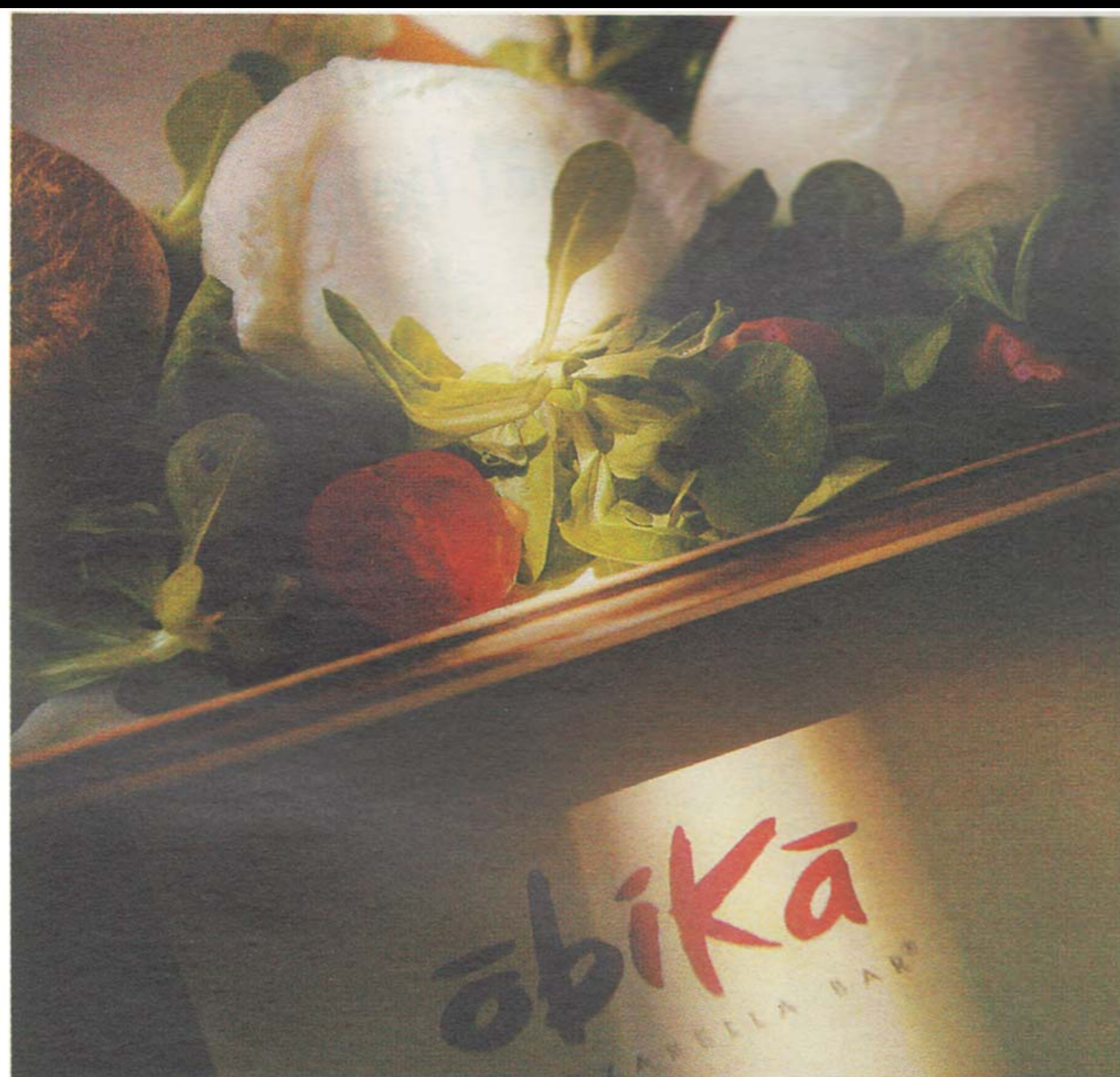




# THE INDEPENDENT

## ON SUNDAY



## Buffalo charge

Mozzarella is the new sushi, says Andrew Tuck

**T**he idea came to Silvio Ursini in Rome as he watched his countrymen in a sushi bar. "I thought there must be an Italian equivalent," he says. "A food that's fresh, quick, light and healthy – that can be served in a setting with a similar aesthetic." And then it struck him: mozzarella.

Ursini, is a Neapolitan and the region for making true mozzarella stretches from his home city along Italy's western coast to just south of Rome. Formerly an area of mosquito-infested swamps, much of this land was drained in the 1930s but it is still where the herds of buffalo live that provide the milk to make this tender white cheese.

Ursini has been brought up to appreciate its subtle tastes. He also knows that good mozzarella must never be dressed in oil or served with anything as overpowering as garlic. If he served this delicacy correctly – say with wild-boar prosciutto or a salami made from free-range Cinta Senese pigs – he knew that he would be able to give sushi bars a run for their yen.

So last year, he founded the chic Obika Mozzarella Bar in Rome (the name sounds Japanese, but it means

"here it is" in the Neapolitan dialect). A Milan outlet followed (which is where I receive my lesson in cheese appreciation from Ursini) and, now, just opened, is an outpost in Selfridges, London. In all three, you eat at wooden tables, the mozzarella are kept in "aquariums", and every dish is prepared in front of you.

Ursini's mozzarellas – the delicate mozzarella di bufala Campana from Peatum and the stronger Piana del Volturno – come from just two farms and are flown to his restaurants within hours of being made by hand. They are never refrigerated (it would make them rubbery) and need to be eaten within 36 hours before their flavour starts to become acidic. They are so fresh that when you cut them milk trickles out. Then there are the smoked ones or the burrata, a soft mozzarella pouch filled with cream (OK, so that one isn't so healthy).

Now all that remains to be seen is whether chic Brits will be persuaded to put down their chopsticks and ditch their sandwiches for a slice of Neapolitan life.

*Obika, Selfridges, 400 Oxford Street, London W1, tel: 08708 377 377*

**obika**  
MOZZARELLA BAR®