

Restaurant Business

AUGUST 2010

STREET SMARTS FOR THE ENTREPRENEUR

FOODSERVICE BUYER EMERGING CUISINES

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Outlet: Restaurant Business

Date: August 2010

Circulation: 76,100



ZARE AT FLYTRAP'S MEATBALL TRIO

Persian Spiced and scented with tradition

FRESH, SEASONAL INGREDIENTS, FRAGRANT herbs and spices and bright, simple flavors epitomize Persian cooking—the cuisine of Iran. Female cooks in Iran's home kitchens—not its restaurants—prepare the most authentic Persian food, and that legacy has been preserved by Iranians in America. In recent years, they have expanded that legacy by opening Persian restaurants in U.S. cities.

For example, Azita Bina-Seibel, co-owner of Lala Rokh in Boston, taps into her family's cherished recipes to present a true Persian dining experience.

"The menu is very much my mother's cooking," she says. "I promised her I wouldn't alter the recipes, so I try to achieve the flavors, colors, textures and aromas of the originals." Signatures



BARBERRIES

include Mirza Ghasemi, a smoky blend of roasted eggplant, garlic, tomato and saffron; Morgh Pollo, chicken slow-cooked with cumin, cinnamon, rose petals and barberries; and Chelo Kabob, marinated beef with rice. "Chelo" means rice—a key component of the cuisine.



CHELO KABOB FROM LALA ROKH

Basmati, closest to Persian rice, is easy to source stateside, but Bina-Seibel imports some items. "My mother travels to Iran to bring back certain seasonings, such as fenugreek, saffron, sumac and dried lime. The soil is special there and they just taste different," she claims.

At Zare at Fly Trap in San Francisco, chef-owner Hoss Zare reinterprets the dishes he grew up with in Tabriz, "taking Persian cuisine apart and reconstructing it. I always specialized in French and Italian cooking, but with this restaurant, I wanted to honor my parents," he explains. Relying on childhood taste memories, Zare creates such dishes as Pistachio Meatballs with harissa-honey-pomegranate glaze; Kufteh Tabrizi, a Niman Ranch lamb chop cooked with

preserved lime and turmeric broth; and Grilled Alaskan Salmon with fregola and charmolla (smoked paprika sauce.) Since 25 percent of Zare's customers are vegetarian, he also provides many meatless options. He makes the Kufteh, for example, with bulgur, beans, wild mushrooms, garlic chives, herbs and a 7-spice carrot emulsion. And Zare cooks a vegan version of Ash e Resteh, one of Iran's oldest soups, using root vegetables, beans, greens and herbs. He sources local seafood and produce and relies on purveyors in San Francisco and Los Angeles for esoteric items like barberries and fresh turmeric.

Menu sampler

Shamshiri Grill
Los Angeles, California

Sabzi Polo Mahi

"Green Rice" with green onions, cilantro, parsley, baby dill, fenugreek and garlic. Served with sautéed fillet of fresh Lake Superior white fish; \$17.95

Shiraz
Elmsford, NY

Herb Salad (Basil, tarragon, mint, parsley, scallions, radishes, feta cheese, walnuts, tomatoes and cucumber); \$9

Fesenjan Toasted, ground walnuts and pomegranate paste cooked with meatballs and served with saffron rice; \$14

Reza's Restaurant
Chicago

Lamb Shank simmered in homemade tomato-based sauce; \$17.95

Both Zare and Bina-Seibel agree that fresh herbs and fruit set Persian cuisine apart. Rhubarb, quince, pomegranates and citrus add sweetness and some acidity to dishes, and herbs like mint, dill and tarragon enhance aroma and health. "In Iran, mint is used for migraines, dill for high blood pressure and tarragon for high cholesterol," says Bina-Seibel.



SAFFRON