

THE NEW YORKER

TABLES FOR TWO

TANOREEN

7523 Third Ave., Brooklyn (718-748-5600)

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JULY 5, 2010

In recent years, some scholars have suggested that the pomegranate is the likeliest candidate for the forbidden fruit that Adam and Eve sampled in Genesis. It's fitting, then, that a giant painting of the pomegranate hangs over the dining area at Tanoreen, a place that revels in temptation—and, even more so, in sating it.



Tanoreen, which recently moved down this sleepy Bay Ridge block, tripling its seating in the process, is run by the Palestinian-born chef Rawia Bishara and her daughter, Jumana. The larger space seems necessary to accommodate the almost dizzying array of options: not only is the permanent menu substantial and the list of daily specials formidable but the friendly waitstaff likes to encourage ever bolder choices. (Confronted with a table of diners reluctant to commit to the *sujok*, a stupendously tangy dish whose main ingredient is “Armenian dried meat,” one server resorted to an enthusiastic form of peer pressure: “You’d be surprised how many people like it!”) It’s easy to get caught up in the madcap spirit and lose track of what has been ordered, as well as how much, and it can be a challenge to identify some of the dishes that start arriving. A greenish-brown heap appeared on the table like a delicious riddle—some parts round and some parts flat. It had diminished to almost nothing by the time one of the servers came by to explain precisely what it was that everyone was enjoying so much: fava beans, deconstructed and then sautéed, pods and all, with cumin and onions.

Bishara’s cooking combines Middle Eastern techniques with Mediterranean flavors. But she takes cues from other cuisines, too. An eggplant napoleon is an ode to its principal ingredient, as well as an inspired marriage of textures: layers of feathery fried eggplant rest daintily between smears of baba ghanoush. *Musakhan*—flatbread topped with sumac-spiced chicken, slow-cooked onions, and almond slivers piled high, and sliced like a pizza—is a near-perfect harmony of sweetness and pungency.

Most evenings, Bishara makes the rounds of the restaurant, chatting animatedly with her guests. When asked about the preparation of the Brussels sprouts—both crunchy and tender, they managed to convert an avowed sprout hater on the spot—she responded triumphantly, “Deep fried!” launching into an energetic disquisition about the healthfulness of this maligned method.

There's really only one way to go with dessert: the house specialty, *knafeh*. It looks a bit like a box of Shredded Wheat exploded over a molten wheel of cheese—and, essentially, that's what it is—but the delicate flavor of the orange-blossom syrup that douses the crunchy pastry combines with the mild, oozing cheese so ethereally that it might dampen one's appreciation of cheesecake forever. Such is the cost of succumbing to temptation. (Open Tuesdays through Fridays for lunch and dinner; weekends for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Entrées \$4.50-\$17.) ♦

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