

# WORD OF MOUTH

PETE CHERCHES BLOGS ABOUT FOOD, TRAVEL AND NYC STUFF.

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## Not Your Everyday Middle Eastern Restaurant

I'm rather late to the party as far as Tanoreen is concerned. The restaurant and its Palestinian chef/owner, Rawia Bishara, have received rave reviews from *New York Magazine* and *The New York Times*. Zagat's readers have recently voted the restaurant the top Middle Eastern in the New York area.

New York has a number of good Middle Eastern restaurants, but there's a sameness to many of them, regardless of whether the owners are Lebanese, Egyptian, Yemeni, or whatever. It's a standard Middle Eastern restaurant cuisine. Not so with Tanoreen. The flavors of Rawia Bishara's food exhibit a sensitivity and flair unparalleled at other local Middle Eastern places. Standard menu items like hummus, kibbie and kafta exist on a higher plane. And there are many specialties you won't see on every Middle Eastern menu, some on Tanoreen's regular menu and others on the daily specials.

Tanoreen is a small place in Brooklyn's Bay Ridge, a neighborhood originally settled by Scandinavians, then Italians, and now home to many Arab-American families. I rustled up a party of eight for a blowout meal. We ordered enough for twelve and ate it all, and there were so many more items on the extensive menu that we'd have liked to have tried.

Our congenial waiter put together a fabulous meze of most, if not all, of the restaurant's cold appetizers, apportioning it to two plates. Everything was fabulous, but one of the most interesting items was the cauliflower salad with pomegranate syrup.

### ABOUT ME



#### PETER CHERCHES

is the author of two volumes of short prose: *Condensed Book* and *Between*

*a Dream* and *a Cup of Coffee*, as well as several limited-edition artist's books. His work has recently appeared in the anthologies *Poetry 180* and *Up Is Up, But So Is Down: New York's Downtown Literary Scene, 1974-1992*. His fiction and short prose work has been featured in a wide range of magazines and journals, including *Harper's*, *Semiotext(e)*, *Transatlantic Review*, *Fiction International*, and *Bomb*. *Sonorexia*, the avant-vaudeville music-performance group he co-led with Elliott Sharp in the 1980s, appeared at such legendary venues as *The Mudd Club* and *CBGB*. Cherches is a two-time recipient of New York Foundation for the Arts fellowships in creative nonfiction.

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Musakhan, an appetizer that often appears on the daily specials menu, is a kind of chicken pizza, with caramelized onions, sumac, pine nuts, and lots of olive oil. It's a Palestinian specialty.



Among the main courses, most of which were lamb dishes (the restaurant's strong suit), the absolute favorite at our table were the humongous, melt-in-your-mouth lamb shanks, which had a hearty but delicately complex brown sauce. One member of our party was inspired to clean the bones with canine gusto and eat the marrow out of two large shanks.

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A special of tiny whole-wheat dumplings with chicken was excellent, as were the kibbie and kafta. A side of tangy, lemony string beans was especially satisfying. The only real dud was a lackluster spinach stew with lamb chunks. A large, whole fried snapper, a day's special that the waiter had heartily recommended, was wonderfully seasoned, but it was a bit too dry from overcooking.



Among the deserts we tried the best was a semolina cake that was not as cloyingly sweet as the versions I've tried at other establishments.

Throughout the evening, Ms. Bishara took the occasional break from the kitchen to schmooze with the customers. The restaurant was pretty much full during our two and a half hours there on a midweek evening. Prices are reasonable, and reservations are accepted for parties of four or more. Because

we ordered so much, and had premium items like the whole fish and the lamb shank, our tab came to \$40 per person with tip (and no alcohol is served). I should think that for normal diners it would surely come out to less than \$30.

POSTED BY PETER CHERCHES AT 9:09 AM



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