

Food for Thought

Fresh, Healthy and Home-made Mediterranean Fare in Irvington

by Linda Viertel

Fond memories of home-cooked meals, special recipes, a mother's or grandmothers "touch" with fresh, whole foods, lovingly prepared for family and friends have come alive in Irvington Delight Market, only this

time all that culinary love comes from the Middle East – Jordan, in fact. At Irvington Delight Market, Amal Rabadi and Nebeel (known as "Bill") cook everything at their shop on Broadway, most often made to order; you can enjoy a meal at one of their three shining tables or take it home for a trouble-

free dinner.

Eaten while hot, fresh from the grill, the fryer or the steam pot (for the stuffed grape leaves), your taste buds will come alive with the joy of interesting new spices and herbs deftly combined. It's food like Mama used to make, though, perhaps, not your Mama.

Mediterranean food, characterized as it is by fresh vegetables, yogurt, soups, salads, whole grains such as lentil, chickpeas, freekah and bulghur, provides a healthy diet. And, how convenient for the Irvington High School staff and students to be able to order a healthful snack or lunch, while trying a new, unfamiliar cuisine – and at Irvington Delight there is something for everyone.

Don't be fooled by the deli/grocery look as you enter. Amal and Nabeel have plans to make the center of their store a buffet-style hot-and-cold serving area where you can help yourself and create your own freshly prepared meze (selection) plate. Until then, you can delight in their Arabic Salad display while you watch the kibbie frying, the chicken shawarma being tossed on the grill or the stuffed grape leaves emerging from the steamer. The grape leaves are an interesting "take" on the familiar Greek classic, the leaves homegrown and the stuffing flavored with 7 different spices.

Known, already for their freekah chicken and vegetable soup (lentil soup is offered on Friday and throughout Lent), the soup can even be made without chicken if desired. The Rabadi's signature dishes include the chicken shawarma – boneless chicken pieces marinated in herbs and spice, seared on the grill and served over rice or in a wrap, with home-made garlic sauce. Amal's kibbie is a combination of ground lamb, pine nuts, almonds and onion, patted into an oval and covered with a shell of herbs, bulghur and lean meat. This football shaped creation is then flash-fried. Best to eat this "finger food" right out of the fryer. It is a treat you won't find anywhere else in the river towns.

Complementing their dishes, the Rabadi's make their own condiments – tahini, garlic, cilantro and hot sauces. The smoked eggplant baba ganoush accompaniment is a stand-out- creamy with only a hint of garlic, salt olive oil and lemon. Fattoush, a salad made with fresh cucumbers, tomatoes, onions, parsley, lettuce and fried pita pieces and topped with sumac, a fragrant crimson Mediterranean spice, will be made to order. But, Arabic salad is ready to go, onions, tomatoes, cucumber, parsley and fresh herbs. Hummus, that now well-known puree of chickpeas, tahini, olive oil and lemon, salt and garlic which is a staple for breakfast in Jordan, is always on hand.

But Mediterranean fare is not the only offering at Irvington Delight Market. More traditional cold cut sandwich combos – both American and Italian are available, along

Left: Fresh tabbouleh salad

Below: Kibbie, a fried croquette stuffed with minced onion, meat and a variety of 7 spices.



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Lastly, one should never forget Middle Eastern desserts, especially when homemade. The Rabadi's hareesh, a delicately textured diamond shaped sweet cake, topped with an almond and made with semolina flour, and soaked in sugar syrup can become addictive. Lebanese bahklava, will be a surprise if one is used to the Greek version. The same flaky phyllo dough is layered with pistachios instead of walnuts, soaked in sugar syrup, not honey, all contributing to a lighter color and taste- sweet but not too sweet or cloying. Gorabai cookies are buttery and crunchy, topped with a pistachio and perfect with coffee. For a special treat, try the mabrumeh, filled with pistachios surrounded by shredded phyllo, often made to order.

Amal and Bill have quickly become known as wonderfully friendly people, who enjoy introducing customers to their distinctive offerings - tastes to tantalize the palate. When I visited early on a Friday morning, a Fieldpoint resident, Peter Mollo, was happily wolfing down a spinach, cheese omelet bagel sandwich, and he eagerly said, "The food is terrific. This place is phenomenal and so many choices all cooked to order." And Irvington residents have already discovered the ease of catering from Irvington Delight Market where colorful platters emerge decorated with pine nuts and almonds. (Catering for approximately 50 needs a week's notice; catering for 10-15 only needs a 2 to 3 days.)

When spring finally arrives, you will see herbs planted in the Rabadi's flower boxes – welcoming customers into another world of home-made Mediterranean and American cooking delights. As Peter Mollo said, "All you have to do is taste the food and you'll keep coming back."

If You Go

2 South Broadway, Irvington
 (914) 479-5600 Fax: 479-5622
 Mon.-Fri. 6 a.m.-9 p.m.
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