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Dining Out: Parisa Restaurant is downtown crowd-pleaser

Published: Thursday, August 30, 2012, 2:00 AM



By **Denise Owen Harrigan**

The Onondaga Historical Society on Montgomery Street dwells in the past, as it should.

Its next-door neighbor, Parisa Restaurant, occupies historic space yet is thoroughly modern in its culinary outlook—and in sync with downtown Syracuse's transformation into an upscale urban neighborhood.

On a street long shuttered after business hours, Parisa is now open for dinner as well as lunch. But the big news for the 18-month-old restaurant is the arrival of executive chef and partner Chance Bear, formerly at the helm of Francesca's.

Earlier this year, Bear led a team of local chefs who prepared a dinner at the prestigious James Beard House in New York. He was also voted 2012 Chef of the Year by the Syracuse chapter of the American Culinary Federation.

At Parisa, Bear and partner Peyman Pourpezeshk have added a delicate Persian accent to a modern American menu.

They have also polished and reapointed space once occupied by Brick Alley Grille House and other lunchtime eateries.

When we visited Parisa early on a Thursday evening in August, we sat by the **window** and watched downtown residents stroll with their dogs along the tree-lined street leading to Columbus Circle. The restaurant was just gearing up for the evening and we had the full attention of our server Noelle — the wife of the chef and a **wealth** of culinary knowledge in her own right.

Our meal opened on a bright note with a complimentary plate of house-made pita wedges and beet hummus made with beets from the downtown farmers' market.

An appetizer of fried zucchini (\$9.50) arrived sizzling hot with an ultra-crisp coating and refreshing yogurt and cucumber dill sauce. Inside its featherweight shell, the zucchini had almost melted into a luscious puree. The shrimp kabob (\$12.50), perfectly charred, added aromatic cilantro to its subtly flavored, typically Persian, yogurt sauce at \$12.50

Entrees (\$22.50 to \$28.50) are served with a salad and Parisa's Caesar is memorable — its dressing made from

scratch, greens cold and crisp and pumpernickel croutons made in house.

On the menu, the grilled vegetable tower seemed like a predictable vegetarian option.

On the plate, it was August in all its glory crowned with crispy onions and an elegant goat cheese sauce. Each satisfying layer — portabella mushroom, eggplant, zucchini, tomato and spinach — featured distinct texture and garden-fresh flavor.

But it would be a challenge for any entree on Parisa's menu to compete with the show-stopping presentation of Bear's short ribs.

In the culinary world, there's been much debate about molecular gastronomy: modernist chefs tinkering with the chemistry and physics of **food**. At Parisa, Chef Bear only occasionally — but quite successfully — ventures into this avant-garde territory.

His braised short ribs (\$26.50) arrived under a liquid nitrogen-induced **cloud**. The haze cleared to reveal glazed meaty ribs sprinkled with icy wisps of blue cheese.

According to his wife, Bear had converted the cheese into a foam, using baking powder and vinegar. A burst of liquid nitrogen flash-froze the foam into almost weightless curls of potent flavor. With a decadent dish such as short ribs (perched atop mashed potatoes), this sorcery made delicious sense.

It also made it impossible to resist the **chocolate** nitro shake option (\$4.95) on Parisa's dessert menu.

This frozen concoction begins with a cream base and flavored syrup, each made in house. Just before serving, they go into the blender with a blast of liquid nitrogen. The nitro shake is served in a large wine glass steaming like a witch's cauldron.

Its intense surge of chocolate flavor made us consider moving downtown for daily access to this addictive brew.

THE DETAILS

THE RESTAURANT: **Parisa Restaurant**, 317 Montgomery St., Syracuse; 565-5118.

CREDIT CARDS? Yes.

ACCESS TO DISABLED? Yes.

HOURS: Lunch, 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday to Friday; dinner, 4 p.m. to 9 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday, 4 p.m. to 10 p.m. Friday and Saturday. Sunday brunch, check website for hours.

COST: Appetizers, entrees, dessert and wine for two, including tax and a 20 percent tip, was \$126.68.

Weekend's Dining Out reviews are based on an unannounced, anonymous visit. Denise Owen Harrigan shares reviewing duties with Aimee Koval. Recent reviews are available at syracuse.com/dining.

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