

# PARISA

By Marti Ebert-Wood

## Grilled Vegetable Tower



MICHAEL DAVIS PHOTO

Parisa opened its doors near where I work at my other job (which is way less fun than visiting restaurants and eating out) so I had already been to visit for lunch and dinner before the *Syracuse New Times* gave me this assignment.

But since this place, located on 317 Montgomery St., is the new little jewel in the Syracuse downtown food scene, I had no problem wrangling up some volunteers and heading out again, just to make sure I had all the information I needed to tell you why you should consider a visit to Parisa.

The restaurant is owned by Peyman Pourpezhk and his partners Chance Bear and Chance's wife Noelle. Bear was named the 2012 Chef of the Year by the Syracuse Chapter of the American Culinary Federation and was invited to cook at the James Beard House in New York City earlier this year.

Named for Peyman's daughter, Parisa means "like an angel," and a picture of Peyman's angel looks over the dining room. She must be pleased because the restaurant is a warm, welcoming place where her father greets everyone with a sincere appreciation that they came and a wish that they enjoy themselves completely.

This is not a bright lights, turn-over-the-table-and-be-on-your-way experience. Rather, you feel like you've been welcomed into his home for dinner. We were so relaxed on our last visit that we dined for almost three hours.

If you check out the Facebook site or website at [parisarestaurant.com](http://parisarestaurant.com), you'll see the restaurant refer to itself as a "New American Restaurant?" OK, but I am not

quite sure that is the best way to describe the food. When the restaurant was just getting going, Bear described the cuisine as "Persian-American fusion." This, I think, is closer to the mark but I would add "comfort" as well.

Comfort, specifically, as evidenced by the *koofteh* (Persian meatballs). We tried them for the first time this summer and my husband remarked, "I could eat these all day long." Chewy, herby rice and beef meatballs—the spices would generally vary depending on where you live in Iran—Parisa's suggest tarragon and cinnamon, but I did not ask. They are served as an appetizer in a savory, oily-in-a-good-way sauce that for me screams, "Eat them on a cold, dreary, rainy Syracuse night and be happy."

Dinner begins with homemade pita chips that are particularly light and crispy. During our summer visits we were treated to a hummus made of beets. I was surprised this past visit when the hummus wasn't pink, and found out the ingredients in this item would change to reflect the season. So we more recently enjoyed an apple-cinnamon hummus that was just super.

By the time you read this article, the rest of the menu will have changed to reflect the new autumn season and the current availability of fresh ingredients. But if you can, run, don't walk, and get some fried zucchini before they go off the menu.

Who can get excited about fried zucchini? I didn't think I could but these huge slices are fried in a tempura-type batter and served with a remarkable yogurt sauce. The zucchini remained juicy and flavorful and the dipping sauce must have been flavored with honey because it had a sweet undertone that was fantastic. Throughout the meal we kept on trying to identify the flavors we were tasting and we were confounded.

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Peyman Pourpezeshk and Chance Bear



MICHAEL DAVIS PHOTOS

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When Bear came out to see how we were doing, he told us a recurring “spice” he’s been using is Ras El Hanout, which is an Arabic term that refers to a mixture of the best spices the seller has to offer. Just as in curry, there is no definitive set of spices that comprise it, but it typically contains cardamom, clove, cinnamon, ground chili peppers, coriander, cumin, nutmeg, peppercorn and turmeric. For us, the cinnamon and the cumin combination repeatedly shone through.

Dinner salads are available but perhaps are best sought out at lunch when Bear experiments with special dressings, like a roasted plum or a champagne vinaigrette. When we selected meats for our entrée, they were expertly cooked. Lamb, sliced about a half-inch thick, was crispy on the outside yet juicy and still medium-rare on the inside. Likewise our salmon and monkfish were not overdone. Grab the opportunity to try the Persian rice or the Persian aioli if it is offered with an entrée, because both have a deliciously different flavor.

Bear is also taken with smoke and its culinary uses. The menu currently features duck confit that arrives smoked under glass. The accompanying raspberry onion compote pairs perfectly with the duck and saffron rice. Braised short ribs are delivered to diners on a smoking tray and served with blue cheese foam over mashed potatoes.

If you haven’t had enough smoke, order a liquid nitrogen milkshake. After the frozen concoction is made at the bar, the milkshake is delivered, smoking, to your table and “dangerously frosty,” said my engineer friend. The best part, said his wife, was how you had to “chunk through the crust of cream” to get to the milkshake underneath.

On our last night there, Parisa was busy catering events for the Everson Museum of Art and Onondaga Historical Association. If you can, get one of the tables in the two front windows just for the entertainment value. Besides watching so much of Syracuse walking by, you’ll get to observe folks striding confidently to the front of the restaurant only to try to open the wrong door, and then you get to let them know you saw them.

Parisa is open for lunch weekdays from 11:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. Dinner is served Tuesdays to Thursdays, 4 to 9 p.m.; Fridays and Saturday, 4 to 10 p.m.; with Sunday brunches from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. For more information, call 565-5118. □



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