
Foul For Love

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To this day, the olive oil she uses at Tanoreen, her delightful small restaurant in Bay Ridge, comes from the West Bank, imported by a Chicago company, and her secret spice mixture, which she calls the foundation of her cooking, is roasted and ground for her back home in Nazareth.

The last time she was there she sent back about 55 pounds of it, she said. 'When I use it with chicken, I might add a little more cumin,' she continued. 'When I use it with lamb, a little more coriander. But I always begin with my spices.'

"...But she looks to her late mother as a role model. 'She was a school teacher with five kids to care for, but she was always cooking,' Mrs. Bishara recalled. 'When people had weddings, when they had funerals, they called my mother to make something, like stuffed artichokes or mousakhan.'

Mousakhan is the quintessential Palestinian dish, a savory, sumptuous banquet feast of whole chickens oven-roasted atop freshly baked Arab flatbread with lots of sweet onions and tart, deep-red sumac. Mrs. Bishara does a simplified version at Tanoreen, and she will do the real thing if it is ordered in advance.

Mousakhan apart, Palestinian cooking shares a lot with Jordanian and Lebanese cuisines, as well as with modern Israeli food. The use of exotic spices like cumin, sumac and dried rosebuds is balanced by an emphasis on sweetly pungent green herbs like parsley and cilantro, while the richness of olive oil, roasted almonds and pine nuts is offset by the prominence of flawlessly fresh vegetables and the bright tang of lemon."

Thus the NY Times. I noticed that [New York magazine had done its own review](#), and their advice to avoid overdosing on the starters is well taken. But what neither of the reviews prepares you for is the dessert: Just when you don't believe you could eat another thing, out comes the waiter bearing what looks like a standard upside-down cake — but the force he applies when cutting through it's crust of rosewater syrup, pistachio and crunchy vermicelli makes clear that it's no cake: It's a cheese, light, fluffy, baked. You know you shouldn't, and you know you have to...

As the piece above notes, she'll happily cater to your needs if you call your order in with sufficient lead time. She even catered [my friend Azadeh's book launch](#). And having tried my own hand at a traditional [505naiflaqib](#) break our fast on last Yom Kippur — cumin-lemony lentil soup w -~~α~~(e) h vermicelli noodles and minced-lamb-and-mint meatballs, w -~~α~~(e) h a fatoosh salad on the side (there is no better way to dispose of old p -~~α~~(e) a breads than toasting them and then adding a dusting of sumac and a splash lemon vinaigrette in this otherwise simple salad) — come Pesach, I'm tempted to outsource the whole seder to her!

All I can say is that if Rawia Bishara does not wr -~~α~~(e) e a book chronicling her recipes and the rich, often sad, but ultimately affirming history each dish and spice combinat505ns carries, the world will be a sadder place.

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