



Persepolis serves Persian food at pretty good prices.

Meals & deals

By CYNTHIA KILIAN

For Middle Eastern on the Upper East Side, Persepolis may be your place. The food here is familiar enough for comfort, yet exotic enough to keep things interesting.

What gives dishes at this eight-year-old establishment their special character is that they're Persian — not a cuisine you experience every day. Alongside such Middle Eastern standards as hummus and Greek salad, you can try intriguing edibles like Potato Koo Koo, a concoction of potato, egg and saffron.

While the interior, filled with bottles of wine and books, is homey with its upholstered banquettes and dusty-blue Aubusson-style cushions, most patrons come for the food. For starters, the dips make a perfect match with the complimentary pita, especially the extra-chunky yogurt and cucumber dip and the spinach-and-yogurt *borani* that's tangy with garlic (both \$4.50). Another particularly good appetizer is the

traditional Persian cheese and vegetable plate (\$4.95), which combines tomatoes, scallion and cucumber with feta cheese and a mountain of mint.

What's billed as the "Tabuoli" salad (\$3.50) is light on the cracked wheat but chock-full of vegetables and herbs. Still, there's no

smoother starter than the sauteed eggplant topped with yogurt (\$3.50).

For entrees, diners keep coming for the charred, yet juicy kebobs such as the salmon kebob (\$13.95) and the Caspian kebob (\$15.95), a duo of chicken fillet pieces and chopped steak. Accompanying the main dishes are various rice, including a saffron rice studded with bits of beans.

And, speaking of rice, there may be no better way to end a delicious Middle Eastern meal — on the Upper East Side — than with the rice stick sorbet, in which transparent noodles are frozen in a sweet, rose-flavored ice (\$3.50).

Persepolis
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75th streets)
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By, Steve Cuzzo

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May 10, 2006 -- THE march of progress in Manhattan sure can make you hun gry. In what might be a dubious record, the condo-construction craze is taking out five popular Upper East Side eateries in a single gulp.

The west side of Second Avenue between 74th and 75th streets long felt like Macdougall Street, with tenements housing 10 cafes from corner to corner. Most had sidewalk seating, lending the plain-vanilla precinct of co-ops and mutant Duane Reads a carnival mood.

But developer World Wide has doomed a worldwide culinary confluence as remarkable as any in Jackson Heights. The block boasted, until recently, Italian, Irish, Afghan, Turkish, Persian and Moroccan eateries - plus a bagel shop/deli.

A belly dancer at Moroccan Taj was a warm-weather siren for the whole block, luring locals with babies and tourists from Midtown hotels.

"It was fun," says Caroline Tetrault, bartender at Persian-style Persepolis, where loyal customers who like to sit outdoors now eat under a gloomy sidewalk bridge that enshrouds six storefronts. "After we were done with our shifts, we'd go to [next-door] Kelly's for a drink. The Italian guys came here for coffee."

Recent interlopers Dunkin' Donuts and sweet shop Maggie Moo's thinned the culinary cream a bit. Then, wham! World Wide, which plans a 30-plus-story apartment project, took control of the southern blockfront.

Last week, two Irish places and the bagel shop shuttered. Zuccherio e Pomodori will serve its last meals on Mother's Day and reopen May 17 in a space up the block less than half its current size.

Meanwhile, Persepolis, famed for Fensenjoon chicken in walnut-pomegranate sauce, is bravely hanging in.

"We have a lease until 2011, and we'll be here until 2011," vows manager Parvet Eliass. But it would be the exception to the rule around town, where developers offer holdouts dough to leave early.

Nobody can begrudge the boom that's replaced dilapidated tenements with splendid new apartments. But low-rent tenement buildings are where cozy, cheap eateries tend to cluster. And when the buildings fall, the collateral damage is painful.

I'm going to miss the Second Avenue outcasts - friendly places for a moderately priced meal when eating in or eating fancily is not an option.

And while I'd never mistake it for Il Mulino, I marvel at how good Zuccherio e Pomodori's house-made pasta dishes can be for as little as \$10.95.

This will be Zuccherio's second forced move to make way for a high-rise. Tarek Alam, the manager and a co-owner with the family of Rico Malta, said it was once two separate restaurants - one in half the present location, the other two blocks north.

"They threw us out of there, too, about six years ago," Alam recalled.

But Malta is a landlord too. He happens to own the blockfront's northernmost building, 1439 Second Ave. - home to celebrity-magnet Baraonda, scene of many a Page Six item.

Alam has his eyes on Baraonda's corner space when its lease expires. The Baraonda guys had better start looking now.