

**RESTAURANT REVIEW**

# Flavorful in any language

*Persian-named Mazadar adds to area Afghan menu*

By Susie Davidson Powell

**M**azadar Mediterranean Kitchen, a new restaurant on Central Avenue near Route 155 in Colonie, has taken the bright red-and-white format of fast-casual burger chains and applied it to Afghan food. Kitted out with almost surgical lighting and giant word-art splashed across walls, its gleaming newness and stark modernity stand in contrast to trademark Afghan plates. Counter service is swift, beaming staff are friendly, and the pleather and laminate booths spotlessly clean.

New to the spawning crop of Mediterranean restaurants, Mazadar provides little clue to its roots, though the name — Mazadar — is Persian for delicious (or tasty or yummy, depending on your translation tool). And expanding on the falafel, kebabs and yogurt dips of other Mediterranean eateries operated locally by immigrants from Lebanon to Azerbaijan, Mazadar's appetizers take you to South Central Asia and plant you firmly in Afghanistan.

Moreover, owner Mahmood Faiz, whose Afghan family migrated to Pakistan, comes to the Capital Region via Maryland, having worked in Afghan restaurants like Maiwand Kabob and The Helmand, a fine-dining destination owned by the brother of Hamid Karzai, the former Afghan president. Joining an Albany-based business partner, Amin Sarpaz, Faiz has assembled a diverse kitchen staff that hails from Iraq, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan, which seems

rather fitting when you consider the herbs and exotic spices that journeyed along the Silk Road through Asia to the Middle East, coloring the culinary lexicon along the way.

At Mazadar, Afghan dishes are often aromatic with cardamom, cinnamon and cumin, and sometimes spiced heavily enough to suggest influences from Pakistan and Iran. Finely crushed cardamom not only adds fragrance but unexpected

Please see **DINING 4** ▶



Photos by Lori Van Buren / Times Union  
Offerings at Mazadar Mediterranean Kitchen include, above, a falafel platter and, at right, a chicken wrap.

## Mazadar adds to area's rich ethnic options

### DINING

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texture in kadu borani, a savory baked-pumpkin purée appetizer drizzled in thinned garlic yogurt. We scoop it up with forks and swab it with the thick dimpled squares of Afghan naan that bear closer resemblance to pillowy focaccia than tandoor flatbread.

Our meal ends with a full-scale riot of cardamom in firnee, a bold rosewater and cardamom custard dessert sprinkled with pistachios. Absolutely smashing. Naturally, as you'd expect of a Muslim fast-food joint, there's no liquor license, so we sip bottomless cups of cardamom-infused Afghan tea (honestly one of life's great things), our cups constantly refilled in a nod to the traditional hospitality of Afghan hosts.

Since we're dining in, in spite of the unforgiving light, our server keeps plates coming. We share oversized mantu, opaque pinched dumplings filled with minced beef and onion, just spicy enough to prickle sinuses and topped in dal-like lentils with a tangy mint yogurt. We snap the crisp outer shells of fried bolani — potato-filled turnovers stained vivid turmeric yellow — and plunge more naan into banjan borani, an unctuous, oily stew of fried eggplant, green pepper and tomato, with its richness cut by a palate-cleansing mint labneh (strained yogurt). Creamy hummus speckled bruise-red with Afghan sumac is silky with olive oil and surprisingly mild, less garlicky than most; my guest adds salt.

You can order kofta and kebab entrees in every combo of chicken, lamb or beef, and all are close in price. Beef kofta — spiced and finely minced to the texture of a meatball — is hand-molded onto a spit and derives umami powers from a small amount of added lamb, while chunky kebabs cooked on sputtering skewers are densely flavored with drippings. Nothing gives flavor like sizzling fat. Lamb chops with lollipop bone handles have deliciously shaggy, crusted edges. Grass-fed, they pack superb flavor but are perhaps tougher to cut than hoped. Daubing on the cayenne-laced hot sauce, or mint-cilantro dressing sent out in large squeeze bottles, delivers heat and tang in piquant, vinegary blasts.

Rice comes with each entree, but the carrot-raisin kabuli topping is well worth

### Mazadar Mediterranean Kitchen

1839 Central Ave.  
Colonie

- Phone: 518-46-0800
- Web: mazadar.com
- Hours: 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. Sunday to Thursday, 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Friday and Saturday.
- Price: Moderate. Menu, \$5.50 to \$18.95
- Food: Mediterranean kebabs, kofta and wraps with Afghan specialties.
- Drink: Soda, water, Afghan tea.
- Ambiance: Brightly lit, fast-casual takeout.
- Noise: 1
- Good for: Quick lunch, dinner, takeout; online ordering and delivery via Grubhub and Doordash. ADA accessible.



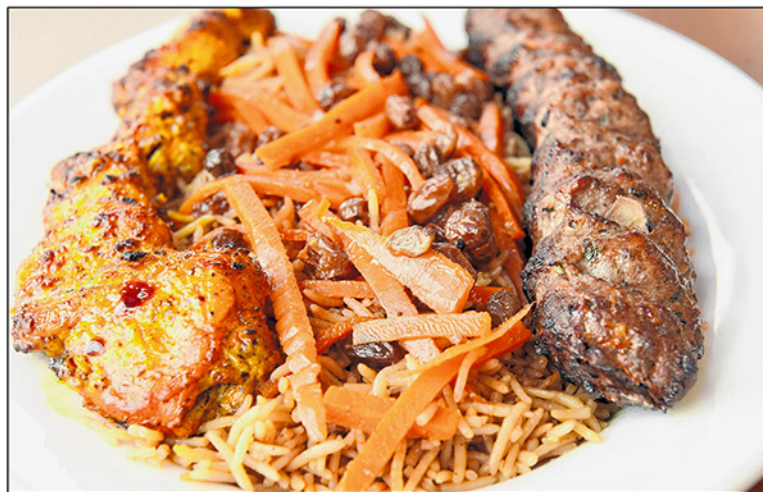
Potato bolani at Mazadar Mediterranean Kitchen.

the \$1.50 upgrade: Scented with cumin and cardamom, the sweet kabuli rice is bronzed and glazed, an effect of having soaked in sugar water overnight.

I stopped back for takeout, including more banjan borani and a classic falafel wrap in which three nutty, deep-fried chickpea patties are slathered in Mazadar's white sauce (a mayonnaise cousin of tartar) and folded with lettuce and tomatoes in warm flatbread. One to beat for a desk lunch.

▶ Susie Davidson Powell is a British freelance food writer in upstate New York. Follow her on Twitter, @SusieDP. To comment on this review, visit the Table Hopping blog, [blog.timesunion.com/tablehopping](http://blog.timesunion.com/tablehopping).

Noise rating: 1 — quiet; 2 — comfortable/conversational; 3 — loud; 4 — disruptive.  
Price range: Inexpensive, Moderate, Somewhat Expensive, Very Expensive



Beef kofta and chicken kebab at Mazadar Mediterranean Kitchen.

Photos by Lori Van Buren / Times Union