

Arya: Fast Becoming a Redwood City 'Persian and Italian' Favorite

By Julie McCoy, contributing writer



Owner and chef Mike Hashemi and some of the quality selections from Arya.



Fera and Mike Hashemi are passionate about people, food and hospitality. And the couple is sharing that passion, along with their Persian culture, with the opening of their second Arya restaurant, which made its debut in downtown Redwood City this spring.

Arya, which opened at 885 Middlefield Road in early March, offers a unique combination of Persian and Italian food.

The most popular appetizer is the pomegranate pistachio meatball, which is oven-baked in a pinot noir molasses sauce, Fera Hashemi said. "It's very different," she explained. "It's one of Mike's creations ... It's spicy and sweet at the same time."

Borani, a yogurt-based dish from Iran, is another popular appetizer. "It's light and flaky," Fera Hashemi said. "It's an awesome dish."

Popular entrees include kebabs and red velvet salmon, which is made with cherry reduction sauce and comes on a bed of sautéed spinach and garlic mashed potatoes.

The red velvet salmon happens to be Fera Hashemi's personal favorite. "I could eat that every day of the week," she said.

Arya also serves wraps and stews, which are made in-house every day. Fesenjoon, a pomegranate, walnut and chicken stew, takes three hours to cook.

"Persian food is such a melody of soft senses," Fera Hashemi said. "You can actually taste what you're eating when you have it. It's the healthiest cuisine out there right now. We don't use heavy oils. No heavy ingredients. All the ingredients are fresh."

Arya uses a lot of fresh herbs, including basil, parsley and barberry, and dates, Fera Hashemi noted.

There are other places in Redwood City where you can get Persian food, but they aren't sit-down and fine dining, Fera Hashemi pointed out.

On the Italian side, one of Arya's more popular dishes is pollo firenze — chicken breast stuffed with ricotta, mozzarella and spinach, rolled then oven-baked and topped with a lemon cream sauce. Arya also serves pasta, lasagna and pizzas made in its wood-fired oven. Additionally, Arya makes its own bread daily.

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The restaurant has an outdoor patio and two private dining areas for corporate events and celebrations. Catering services are available as well. "We're doing a lot of corporate catering and deliveries," Fera Hashemi said. "People are not finding the time to go out while working. The offices are telling us to bring the food to them."

Cris and H.B. Mangar of Hillsborough have been to Arya three times and are planning to come back again. "We like to do different kinds of foods," Cris Mangar said.

The staff is good and Fera Hashemi is friendly, Cris Mangar noted. "She's always around." H.B. Mangar noted that the restaurant is clean and the service is good.

Arya means "strength" and "to belong to the land." A similar word, Aria, also means "a music melody" in Italian.

Arya is a family-friendly establishment and offers a children's menu. "My kids would have it no other way," Fera Hashemi said. "We basically cater to everybody."

On Friday and Saturday nights between the hours of 7:30 and 11 p.m., Arya is alive with entertainment, including three different types of jazz — classical, Persian and Italian. "We rotate all the bands," Fera Hashemi said. "We have a calendar ready a month in advance."

Arya also features belly dancing on Friday and Saturday nights.

"It [the entertainment] really does make a nice ambiance and adds to the dining experience," Fera Hashemi said.

Arya is next to Century 20 Downtown Redwood City, and the Fox Theatre is also nearby, so people can enjoy a meal before or after a movie or a theatrical performance.

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Owner Fera Hashemi always welcomes everyone with a smile!

Eric Lochtefeld, who operates the Fox Theatre with his wife, Lori, said, "Lori and I are super supportive of Arya and the owners, Mike and Fera. Our patrons are always looking for a nice preshow dining experience in Redwood City, so Arya is a perfect neighbor to the Fox Theatre. The food is fantastic and it is fairly priced."

The Fox Theatre is partnering with Arya to host a special preshow dinner for opening night of "A Chorus Line" on Sept. 22, Lochtefeld said.

In addition to the Arya in Redwood City, the Hashemis also own another Arya restaurant in Cupertino, which they opened in 2007. The couple divides their time between both locations.

Why did they choose to expand to Redwood City? A lot of people were coming to the Cupertino location from South San Francisco and the Peninsula and were asking for something closer, Fera Hashemi explained.

"We picked Redwood City because it's so diverse as well," she said. "It's close to the county [buildings]. The county employees have been supportive. The city also has been very helpful as well."

She noted, "Coming to Redwood City has been a great thing. Coming to Redwood City has been able to take us to the next level."

Mike Hashemi added, "Redwood City is growing. They're building something like Santana Row right in front of my restaurant. There is a big parking lot with plenty of convenient parking."

The décor at the Redwood City location is more modern, whereas the Cupertino location has more of a classical décor.

Another difference is that the Redwood City location has an open kitchen, whereas the Cupertino location has a closed kitchen. "There is a lot of action going on [at the Redwood City location]," Mike Hashemi said. "They see how they [the chefs] cook."

The Redwood City location has a high ceiling and a wine bar in the front, whereas the Cupertino location features a full bar. The Cupertino location has a full liquor license, and Mike Hashemi said he's working to get the same for the Redwood City location.

Mike Hashemi, who has worked in the restaurant business since 1988, became a chef in 1993.

Originally from Iran, Mike Hashemi went to Florence, where his sisters live. He came to the U.S. with the idea of starting an Italian restaurant.

He opened two pizzerias and an Italian kitchen in Southern California, which were sold prior to opening Arya in Cupertino.

Fera Hashemi studied marketing and hospitality at Irving Valley College. She loves marketing and people and self-taught herself everything in the restaurant business, she explained. "I just have that hospitality gene in me," she said.

She did a lot of networking with successful restaurant owners in Orange County. "I've had great mentors in life," she said.

The Hashemis have three children, daughter Madina, 18, son Mehdi, 11, and daughter Rayhana, 5.

Madina, who is following in her father's footsteps, was recently accepted at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, N.Y. "She wants to be a pastry chef," Fera Hashemi said.

When she's not busy running two Arya restaurants, Fera Hashemi enjoys watching her kids participate in their sports. Rayhana swims and Mehdi plays competitive soccer. "If I'm not in the restaurant, I'm on the soccer field," Fera Hashemi said. "I'm a total soccer mom."

