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Published April 15th, 2009

Turquoise: A New Gem in Orinda

By Dean Okamura

"Welcome my friend," is the warm greeting given to diners at Turquoise Mediterranean Grill. Located at 70 Moraga Way in Orinda, this jewel of an eatery shines as brightly as its namesake hue.

Opened in October 2008, owner, Talal "Tee" Hayder wanted it to be all about the food. "What you feed your family at home is always the freshest...that is what I want to give to the public," Tee says with pride.

Deep flavors and beautiful textures combine thanks to a commitment to making every possible ingredient fresh daily. "We don't cook your food until you order it," Tee adds, "We won't par cook anything."

Most quick serve restaurants find this level of quality price prohibitive. The industry mantra is to reduce costs. They become forced to buy prepackaged and frozen ingredients. That is a difference you can taste.

Turquoise' baba gannouge has a wonderful texture and light twang of lemon. The hummus is dense and mild. If you order the kebab, you can be confident that it was ground only hours before your first bite. Homemade quality lingers in your palate.

Sure the flavors are spot on, but it's easy to get lost in wondering, "Was this just made?"

Joy oozes from the immaculate open kitchen as Tee and his father quickly pack 250 lunches for the Orinda Intermediate School. Linda Judkins, Food Service Director, says, "the grilled chicken pita is one of the most popular pre-order items, the kids love them. They are one of the best items we've offered in my three years here."

The menu carries other "kid friendly" treats like fries from Idaho, one of the few prepackaged items Tee lets in the place and something he calls a "Pit-Za". This tasty little gem is a pita filled with cheese or kebab meat and heated like a pizza, cut in quarters, and gone before you know it.

As father and son pour their hearts into each dish, you are invited to relax and watch your food being prepared. There is a conspicuous lack of pretense or haste.

Make yourself at home and read a book or strike up conversation with Tee or his father. By the time you leave you'll be full and possibly a little smarter.

Growing up in Lafayette, graduating from Cal, and now living in Moraga, has given Tee a good understanding of Lamorinda. He comments on his strong feelings for the community and wants to offer a comfortable place for people to eat.

As an example, Tee recalls the Presidential Election last year, Tee made the decision to play sports on the flat screen TV. His concern was that politically biased news might agitate his customers.

That level of thoughtfulness is evident in every aspect of Turquoise. There are no shortcuts or compromises. Just quality food and friendly conversation made fresh daily for your family.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

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