

Molly Abraham's Restaurants of Detroit

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Detroit Free Press

Molly Abraham

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Ayse's Courtyard Cafe



Turkish food has been a rarity locally. To the best of my knowledge, this is the only place to find it in the metro area. The 20-seat spot not far from the North Campus of the University of Michigan is immaculate and attractive with its patterned wallpaper, big windows and classical music in the background.

When Ayse (pronounced Eye-she) Uras opened the cafe, she expected it to be predominately carry-out. But not so. "People came in and sat down, so we started serving them," she says, and she continues to do so, using real china and flatware, not the throwaways that might be expected.

The room itself, boasting a baker's rack filled with Turkish imports including hot pepper sauce, jams and candy, is a model of cleanliness. I can well understand why people didn't just rush out with their bags and boxes. It's simply a pleasant place to sit and enjoy the fragrance emanating from the tiny kitchen.

What's cooking? Perhaps red peppers stuffed with a delicate mixture of rice, ground beef, mint, dill and flat-leaf parsley — herbs that, along with coriander and crushed red pepper, are prominent in this cuisine.

Among the typical main dishes are spicy lamb, beef or vegetable stew, meat pizzas called lahmacun, and meat-stuffed eggplant. Soups are notable, including ezo, a blend of yogurt, tomato, mint and vermicelli; lentil; and yogurt, dill and cucumber.

Other staples include cheese, spinach and potato pastries (borek); a changing array of vegetarian side dishes, and salads ranging from lentil to baby eggplant.

Everything is displayed in a glass-enclosed case. Diners simply browse the case and choose what they want. The food is served to their table, along with Turkish juices or soft drinks, iced tea and, of course, strong Turkish coffee in tiny cups.

Uras is the first in her family to be a restaurateur. Her husband, Mehmet Uras, teaches mechanical engineering at Wayne State University.



1703 Plymouth Road, Ann Arbor.
(313) 662-1711.

Hours: 11 a.m.-8 p.m. Mon.-Thu., 11 a.m.-9 p.m. Fri.-Sat. Closed Sun. and major holidays.

Nonsmoking: 100 percent.

No bar.

No credit cards.

Reasonable.