



CAPITOL CHILL



BY KELLY MAGVARICS

Martini service
at Josephine.

PHOTO: REY LOPEZ

Yes, Chef

D.C. DINERS FEEL THE LOVE FOR A COZY BRASSERIE AND A PERSIAN CONCEPT FROM A RENOWNED IRANIAN CHEF AND AUTHOR

The words “Martinis” and “bubbles” always draw me to a beverage list. You’ll find both at Josephine, a new brasserie from the Neighborhood Restaurant Group (NRG) located in a restored, brick-lined 19th-century firehouse in Old Town Alexandria. The space’s massive size, seating 220, belies its warm and cozy ambiance, derived from various nooks, pendant lights repurposed from the Paris Métro, and a patio adorned with murals and string lights.

But back to those beverages. Three different Martinis—the Classic Dirty with house olive brine and Niçoise olives, a savory iteration with caviar-infused vodka and saline, and (my pick) the 50-50—are each presented on a silver tray with a tin of garnishes and a sidecar carafe over ice for top-offs. *Magnifique*. NRG wine director Erin Dudley’s all-French wine list, meanwhile, includes four terroir-driven and grower Champagnes and six Crémants, all available in a 5-ounce glass or a 3-ounce coupe to allow you to build your own flights of fancy.

Executive chef Matt Cockrell, whose 20 years of culinary experience have been devoted exclusively to French cuisine at spots like Le Diplomate and Brasserie Liberté, hits all the expected Gallic high notes, from cornichon-studded pâté de campagne and fennel-scented moules frites to a Provence-inspired seared red drum with squid-ink beurre blanc.

Cockrell isn’t the only chef currently making waves in Northern Virginia. Najmieh Batmanglij, dubbed “the Grande Dame of Iranian cooking” by *The Washington Post*, learned to cook after her family fled the Iranian Revolution to seek refuge in France in 1979. Since then, Batmanglij has become a lauded chef, cookbook author, and culinary instructor. Her latest venture, Joon in Tysons Corner, is co-helmed by Christopher Morgan, who earned a Michelin star at Maydan; together, they transport guests to the Middle East via a tapestry of cultures and influences.

The menu is dotted with exciting flavors—saffron, sour oranges, barberries, Aleppo chiles—but unless you’re well versed in Persian cuisine, it can be tricky to navigate beyond the familiar kabob menu, since dishes are listed by their Persian names. Our server was equally perplexed on opening night; thankfully, co-founder Reza Farahani was on hand to guide us.

While my teenagers and I were sussing things out, I had a white Tehrooni Negroni that hit the spot. Containing gin, blanc vermouth, and bergamot liqueur, it was served over a saffron-infused ice sphere. The Limoo Daiquiri got a Persian twist from black-lime cordial, while handmade sodas in flavors like sour cherry-tarragon were fun zero-proof options.

Addictive spreads like the mast-o-musir with yogurt, dried shallots,



PHOTO: KELLY MAGVARICS

Persian love cake at Joon.

mint, and rose petals came with a seemingly endless supply of still-warm pita bread, and lamb-and-pistachio meatballs in pomegranate glaze inspired us to order seconds. Larger family-style platters included whole-roasted dry-aged duck with tahdig, the Persian version of socarrat, as the coveted crispy rice at the bottom of a paella pan is called.

As we were tucking into a slice of Persian love cake, a confection of rosewater, pistachios, and cardamom created by a woman pining for a Persian prince, Batmanglij paid a visit to our table. She shared the story with my kids about how she fled her homeland, then advised them to “follow their dreams, pursue their passions, and don’t be afraid.” Joon is Persian for “soul” or “spirit,” and the soul of this culinary legend is indeed expressed throughout this love letter to her Iranian roots. [L](#)