

by **Betsey Beaven** photos by **Kevin Harkins**

YELLA GRILLE

Yella Grille is a modern Mediterranean restaurant tucked away like a hidden gem in downtown Andover. Yella, which means, “Come on, let’s go,” in Arabic, is a small, comfortable and attractive space where guests feel immediately welcomed. With dimmed lights and the soft sound of Lebanese music in the background, the ambience is warm, intimate and inviting.

Chef Carlo Berdahn and his wife, Danielle, own the restaurant and are warm, friendly people who are passionate about great tasting food.

Carlo, who grew up in northern Lebanon, presents a menu that incorporates both the authentic regional cuisine of his native country along with traditional Mediterranean dishes.

On a recent visit to the restaurant with some friends, I was impressed by the presentation of some delicious, often simple, but well crafted food.

I started with the Mediterranean Mezza Platter, which consisted of a variety of appetizers, including kibbe, meat pies, grape leaves, spring rolls, falafel and babaganouj. Each was distinct, flavorful and arranged attractively. The fresh vegetarian grape leaves with rice, tomato and herbs melted in my mouth and were some of the best I’ve eaten. The velvety texture and the rich, slightly smoky flavor of the fire-roasted eggplant in the babaganouj was simply delicious.

The kibbe is stuffed with cracked wheat and handmade by the chef. My taste buds were delightfully transformed with each bite. The spring rolls were crispy and well seasoned with herbs and feta cheese, and the meat pies were quite tasty. Only the falafel disappointed; I would have liked more spices or seasoning, and the tahini sauce was too thin for my taste.

My friends and I shared Fattouch, a traditional Lebanese salad consisting of crisp romaine lettuce, fried pita bread chunks, parsley, mint and a special chef’s dressing. The salad was attractively garnished with powdered sumac; its tart, pleasant flavor is often included in Middle Eastern dishes.

I rarely order chicken at a restaurant, but something about the description of the Mediterranean Chicken intrigued me. My hunch proved right, as it is chef Carlo’s momma’s recipe and a truly unique dish.



Top: Pan Seared Wild Salmon with Beurre Blanc, accompanied by Sauté’ Spinach with an Eggplant Zucchini Sweet Potato, Butternut Squash Napoleon. Above: The interior of the restaurant is modern, comfortable and attractive. Opposite page: Yella Grill owners Danielle and Carlo Berdahn.

The shredded pieces of chicken were flavored with Lebanese cinnamon — a slightly smoky, milder version of the more pungent and sharp cinnamon that I am used to eating — and served with an almond rice pilaf covered with a rich Greek yogurt. I loved the intricate nuance of flavors and the roasted taste and crunchy texture of the almonds. It was a very satisfying choice.

I also had a few delicious bites of a rich Truffled Pappardelle, perfectly cooked pasta with wild mushrooms and sauteed fresh spinach, and seasoned with truffle oil and shredded Parmesan cheese.

A friend gave me a taste of his Combination Platter — grilled sirloin, chicken and kaffa served with delicious homemade french fries. The skewers of meat were tender, well seasoned and quite tasty.

I ordered an Almaza, a Lebanese pilsner with a refreshing and distinct hop flavor that complemented the food well.

Danielle has assembled a nice selection of wines, and at her suggestion I tried the Vino Generoso, a sweet and spicy dessert wine with a hint of black pepper. I thoroughly enjoyed each sip.



Too full for dessert, I shared a bite of homemade baklava. It was sweet, flakey and left me wanting more.

What I like most about Mediterranean food is how it's big on vegetables, low on meat and high on flavor. This is true for Yella Grille, where vegetarians will find plenty to eat.

It's worth many visits.

MVM

Yella Grille is located at 16 Post Office Avenue, Andover, Mass. The restaurant serves lunch Tuesday through Friday from 11:00 a.m. to 4 p.m. Dinner is served Tuesday through Thursday from 4 to 9 p.m.; Friday and Saturday from 4 to 10 p.m.; and Sunday from 4 to 8 p.m. Reservations recommended - (978) 749-0011. www.yellagrille.com

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