

Drina Daisy

Traditional Bosnian home cooking with a bevy of confounding caveats

Sometimes I envy the melting pot of a big city. As ethnic dining options on the North Coast are relatively limited, the flagpole establishments carry added importance. They are needed. I want them to succeed, multiply and enthrall. I want them all to be great.

So when I entered Astoria's Drina Daisy, family-owned and proudly Bosnian, I did with tangible excitement. I was ready — longing even — for something different. That goodwill I came with, however, was slowly but surely chipped away at, piece by piece.

On a sunny Friday evening, my companion and I were seated just before 7 p.m. The serene, homey dining room was not quite full. The menu hinted at the quirks to come: "Presentation may vary by availability & mood." I was onboard —

indeed, give me a chef who's inspired. Our waiter offered to combine the smoked beef and sausage appetizers (\$12), and we obliged.

When the dish arrived I was hoping to learn, but the waiter only pointed and huffed: "beef, sausage, goat and farm cheese." On the plate too were pickled peppers, whose acidity paired well with the creamy cheeses and smoked meats. I favored the mild goat and sausage, which was evenly ground. Some bread would've been nice — only after we were well on to the entrées did we learn that ours had been forgotten.

Waiting for the main course, I took notice of the room, which was attended to by the single server and a busser/food-runner who disappeared for long stretches. No table sat more than four patrons, yet entrées arrived in staggered fashion — even for two-tops. I watched one diner receive their meal almost five minutes after their companion had been served. At one point a napkin dropped by a previous customer was picked off the floor and placed on the current diner's table. In two brief flurries yelling from the kitchen was audible. By this time our drinks and waters were long empty. They

would go the entire night without being re-filled.

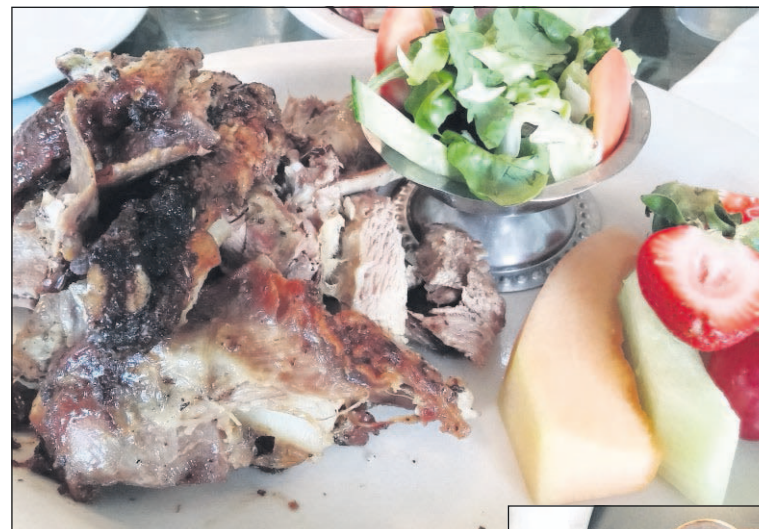
The lamb dishes being delivered looked marvelous, particularly the platter for two (\$49),

served on a stainless tray, a grand mountain of meat with bones jutting skyward. Ensnared by a rainbow of pineapples, strawberries, melons and greens, its decadence harkened to a medieval bacchanal.

While my single serving (\$27) boasted a heaping hill of meat, the cuts were not so magisterial. Receiving the last lamb of the day I believe I got the dregs, including unappealing sections of fat and cartilage. Still, there was plenty to eat, and while some pieces were charred, others were finely tender, caramelized, and lightly salted. Along with the tart, sweet fruits, a small salad offered enlivened counterpoint. My companion's Stuffed Cabbage Leaves with Vegetables (\$17), a vegetarian option topped with parsley and a mild red pepper sauce was very buttery.

The check came with a tabulation error that took extra time to fix. I left puzzled — was this just a bad night for Drina Daisy?

We went back the next day. The same waiter sat us, but made no mention of our return. He either didn't notice or didn't care. He was again curt, not particularly hospitable. When another



The Mouth's roasted lamb entre boasted a lot of meat but not choice cuts. The tart, sweet fruits, a small salad offered enlivened counterpoint.

The Sarajevo-Style Minas Coffee is served on an ornate platter in a miniature copper dish with a small cup, a glass of mineral water, a butter cookie and a small dish containing sugar cubes.

customer asked about what accompanied the lamb he responded: "everything but the kitchen sink." I found it incredulous, because a paying customer should know what they're about to be served/asked to pay for. This time our waters were refilled and bread delivered. But as more customers filed in, the attentiveness diminished. When a table received lamb for three it took their pointing out that there were only sides for two.

I ordered the Spinach Pita. Wrapped in thin, flaky filo dough were eggs, farm cheese, and only a few cursory slivers of spinach. Served with fruit, I found it better suited for breakfast (and, at \$18, a lot to pay for eggs, dough and cheese). My companion found it too salty to eat at all. She had Sarajevo-Style Minas Coffee (\$4), which was served on an ornate platter, and a Desert Baklava



(\$4). The coffee was dark, rich, and strong, but the baklava was soggy and overly sugary.

We finished, stacked our dishes, and pushed them to the edge of the table, signaling we had finished. As we waited for the check there was no contact for the next 20 minutes. No asking if we needed anything, no water, no bussing. Drina Daisy was disrespecting our time.

Many other routine priorities were out of whack — like bussing empty tables while still-dining customers needed attention. At no point in two visits was the rush overwhelming; the systems were simply inefficient. Even a service industry novice could streamline them in no time. The food, meanwhile, was adequate, though I can't help but wonder if, depending on the chef's "mood," it could've been great. Such variance just shouldn't be.

These issues are so frustratingly obvious and with easy remedy that I can hardly fathom how blatantly they're bungled. The North Coast deserves to enjoy Bosnian cuisine prepared with consistency and served with care. Were they to hone and honor that attention to detail, the name Drina Daisy could be sung for miles around.

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mouth

OF THE COLUMBIA

COAST WEEKEND'S LOCAL RESTAURANT REVIEW

Story and photos by THE MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA • mouth@coastweekend.com

Drina Daisy

Rating: ★★
915 Commercial St.
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HOURS: 11 a.m. to 10 p.m. Wednesday to Sunday.

PRICE: \$\$ — Entrées range from \$18 to \$27

SERVICE: Curt, slow, mistake-prone.

VEGETARIAN OPTIONS: A few vegetarian entrées, all of which are made with butter.

DRINKS: Wine, beer, soda, tea and coffee.

KEY TO RATINGS

- ★ poor
- ★★ below average
- ★★★ good & worth returning
- ★★★★ excellent
- ★★★★★ outstanding, the best in the Columbia-Pacific region