

Kabob House

Persian charm and flavors come to Long Beach

I've been absolutely delighted since stumbling upon the Kabob House, which opened this August in Long Beach. It's the kind of passionate bet on food that the North Coast needs more of. Indeed, the idea makes me smile as much as the beef makes me swoon.

The Kabob House is Behnoosh Ghorbani. "Call me 'B,'" Ghorbani says. "It's easier." She is the sole owner, proprietor and employee.

B was born in Iran. She's lived in the West for "only" 15 years, many of which she spent in Portland assisting dental surgeries. "I got sick of dentistry," B says. So, a year or so after moving to the Columbia-Pacific region she decided to take a chance. "I just thought nobody has this food here."

She's right. Like countless others, Persian flavors have been almost wholly absent in the region. The only eateries that come close are the O Falafel truck (Israeli) and Drina Daisy (Bosnian). But those geographical similarities are loose. Regardless, B is doing her own thing.

"These are my mother's recipes, my father's recipes," she says. In general that revolves around chicken, beef and veggie kabobs. They're served regularly at weddings, celebrations and so on.

It makes sense why: After prepping, the kabobs are relatively quick to cook. That said, during a rush service can slow down at Kabob House. Remember: It's just her. Any inefficiencies are wiped away, however, by B's earnest sweetness and charm. And though she's still learning the service industry, she's got the cooking down.

The beef and chicken kabobs wait in the fridge, raw seasoned meat skewered by what looks like a skinny sword or comically long knife. Some 2-feet-long with wooden handles, the skewers are formidable. B places them over a modern, stainless steel pit with open flame. She flips them and doesn't overcook. Everything — save for a side dish of hummus or baba ghanoush — is prepared thusly. The menu is short.

Essentially, you can have your kabob four ways: on rice, a hoagie roll, in a wrap, or with a salad. A combination (\$13.99) features half chicken and half beef, and B is happy to serve it with both rice and a salad. Delivered not on a tray but in a to-go box, I dug first into the beef. It was divine. Juicy, salty, soft and just a little bit of magic. It was exquisitely cooked with just the most ever-so-subtle tweak in seasoning. B told me it was a mix of salt, pepper,

onion and saffron — the latter being, I believe, the pixie dust.

The chicken too was expertly cooked, just blackened on the corners but succulent and evenly cooked from end-to-end. It was as if it had just come off a barbecue. For some there might be a temptation to chop the meat up and distribute it evenly among the rice and/or veggies. I didn't bother — the meats were too good to dilute, particularly that spectacular beef.

Each finished skewer was about the size of a large hot dog and rested upon a bed of buttery, long basmati rice. Alongside was a salad of sliced romaine lettuce, cabbage, cucumbers, tomatoes, a few olives and parsley-sprinkled onions. On its own, the produce was run-of-the mill — the kind at the grocery store that comes wrapped in plastic. (I know this because B's fridges have glass doors.) Despite the mediocre quality and budging freshness, I'd have eaten the salad all day thanks to B's homemade cucumber dressing. (Seriously, get it — don't muck around with the bottled ranch or Thousand Island.) With a yogurt base, it



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A chicken kabob in wrap form (\$7.99) has more roughage, less carbs and a more direct line to flavor, but feels a bit spendy and not entirely filling.

bears striking resemblance to tzatziki, but B's recipe leaves out the garlic. The dressing comes too on both the wraps and sandwiches.

I had the Sandwich (\$7.99) with my beloved beef, which was just as tantalizing the second time. I enjoyed the addition of pickles, whose brine added a pop that the rice combination lacked. Otherwise, the two were much the same, simply swapping white rice for white bread. And the bread did lack. It was a generic hoagie roll, unbecoming of cradling such a fine beef.

The wrap (\$7.99) was essentially the same, only trading the hoagie for a large flour tortilla. The thinner container made room for more roughage, less carbs, and a more direct line to

flavor. But at \$7.99 it felt a bit spendy, and not entirely filling.

B also offers hummus and baba ghanoush sides. I tried the baba ghanoush (\$5.45), and it too felt like it needed the kinks worked out. A bit dull, the olive oil-y dip only came with a single, small piece of pita bread — there was enough dip for four or five.

Indeed, the Kabob House is still very much a work in progress. B is experimenting. She offers a lamb shank (\$16.50), but because of prep time you have to call a day in advance to get it. For a lot of people, myself included, that's awkward. She's also just started making Chicken Stroganoff, but it's only available on Sunday and Monday. Furthermore, B says she has a recipe for another kind of kabob that she wants to do, but the requisite flat iron steak would necessitate an untenable price.

Nonetheless, B is going for it. And that — along with the new flavors and worship-worthy beef — should be celebrated. Sure, there are some wrinkles to be ironed out, some improvements to be made. But B, in her first foray into commercial cooking, is off to a stellar start.

mouth

OF THE COLUMBIA

COAST WEEKEND'S LOCAL RESTAURANT REVIEW

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

Kabob House

Rating: ★ ★ ★ ☆

107 S.E. Third St.
Long Beach, WA
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HOURS: 11:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Wednesday to Monday.

PRICE: \$ — most dishes in the neighborhood of \$10

SERVICE: Charmingly green, though during the rush it can take a little while.

VEGETARIAN / VEGAN OPTIONS: Veggie kabobs, salad, hummus and baba ghanoush

DRINKS: Bottled water, soda

KEY TO RATINGS

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