

# The best new restaurant of 2016

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Of the handful of restaurants that opened on the North Coast in 2016, many — including the ambitious Carruthers in Astoria, the fresh-faced A Mighty Thai in Manzanita and the pricey Pelican Pub in Cannon Beach — were met with great fanfare.

But my favorite new restaurant of 2016 opened quietly. Tucked away in Seaside's tourist milieu, its unlikely existence seemed to perplex residents I told about it. "It's where?" they'd say again. (It's located at 409 Broadway.)

You could plop McBani anywhere, and it'd still be absolutely marvelous. Its inspiration and execution transcends both the cubby hole interior and the blaring surroundings. More than just the year's best new restaurant, McBani is among the best in the region. I knew for certain when I returned recently, as a refresher for this column, finding myself every bit as excited as that first time I visited.

McBani opened in the summer. The owners, a married couple, spent a number of years in Portland after emigrating from Jordan and Lebanon. Naturally, McBani brings those Mediterranean and Middle Eastern flavors to the North Coast. Besides the Kabob House in Long Beach, McBani is the only such cuisine in the region.

McBani's delicately spiced dishes are at once comforting and exquisite. The mere thought of the Beef Kafta makes me drool. Ground with herbs, onions and spices, it's something like God's meat loaf, the saffron whispering of ancient wisdom and elegance. The Lamb Shawarma, so popular McBani has been known to run out, has a similarly deep, tantalizing marinade, with cinnamon, cloves and cumin.

The greatness goes beyond the



PHOTO BY MOUTH OF THE COLUMBIA

**Above:** The beef and chicken kabob combo platter at McBani in Seaside features well-spiced meat offerings.

**Right:** McBani's Stuffed Cabbage Leaves Platter features hummus, salad and cabbage leaves suffed with rice and spiced beef.

meats. McBani offers robust and thoughtful options for vegetarians and vegans alike (or a carnivore taking a break from eating animals). McBani is indeed quite mindful about preparing healthy, whole foods. Everything is made from scratch with natural, kosher ingredients (except the pitas). They boast no GMOs, preservatives or artificial flavors.

Much of McBani's success is rooted in that attention to detail. The staff sweat the small things, and it adds up not only to balanced but gorgeously presented meals. Dishes may not fly out of the kitchen, but it's not the result of dragging inefficiency — it's be-



cause your food is being lovingly, wholly crafted.

Hardly anything in the restaurant is dainty or overpriced. For \$19.95 the Beef Kafta platter in-

cludes a starter — either hummus or baba ganoush, both top notch — a cleansing, acidic Mediterranean salad, basmati rice, and two logs of kafta, just one of which is

likely to satiate, the other to share or take home for later. That is, if you can tear yourself away. You might be full but, that saffron beef is a righteously tempting.

The plate also comes with little accoutrements that multiply the flavors. There are pickled red onions sprinkled with cumin and two hot sauces: a sambal and a pickled garlic-jalapeño sauce. The beef itself is drizzled with the perfect amount of tahini. Then there's a cup of tzatziki, the soothingly cool yogurt-based sauce with cubes of cucumber.

The a la carte Chicken Shawarma Sandwich (\$11.95), which approaches the size of two burritos, stuck end-to-end, has a whole chicken breast worth of meat, maybe more.

Indeed, McBani offers a little bit of everything, almost. As I mentioned, it's both comforting and expansive, accommodating for most any diet and quite reasonably priced. Its setting is not over-the-top romantic, but a couple comfortable without glamour will be well taken care of.

I would be lying, however, if I didn't take a moment to whine about the lack of alcohol. A dry red wine would go so well with those meats.

Nevertheless, McBani not only came out of the gate swinging but has improved since opening. The additions — like including sambal and pickled garlic-jalapeño sauce with the hummus, a dedicated server, and a softer nighttime alternative to the fluorescent lights — are incremental, indicators of ownership's pride and care.

Looking back on restaurants, 2016 saw the continuing expansion of tourist-facing burger and beer joints along the coast. McBani does the yeoman's work of expanding options for residents as well.

Here's hoping 2017 brings more of the world's marvelous cuisines to the North Coast.