

Food doesn't get more authentic than Drina Daisy's

The food isn't complex, but the flavors sing.

By DWIGHT CASWELL
FOR COAST WEEKEND

Why did restaurant designers decide to drag the detritus of abandoned warehouses downtown in the belief that food was more enjoyable with noise reverberating off corrugated metal and repurposed timbers? For that matter, when did restaurant designer become a job? What happened to authenticity? When did we trade the simple pleasures of robust and well-prepared food for picking at diminutive servings of exotic ingredients prepared in unexpected ways?

I've got nothing against innovation, but the meals I remember most have nothing to do with decor. More often I remember the company, the food, or both. I think of an unprepossessing restaurant on the docks in La Paz, Baja California, where a chef named Golda prepared the best fish I have ever eaten. Or a pub in Wales where we ate sea trout bigger than our plates while locals chatted in Welsh, played darts and watched their football on the telly. Or stuffed squid street food in Barcelona.

You get the idea. I like good food, good company and the authenticity of a place where locals hang out.

There is a place like that in Astoria, a small restaurant with a staff of, usually, two. Walking through the door is like walking into your favorite little restaurant four doors down from your rooms in Sarajevo. It's a Bosnian restaurant called Drina Daisy.

At 915 Commercial St., you'll find a 95-year-old Italian Renaissance storefront, the window of which displays an engaging hodgepodge of memorabilia and other items that struck the owner's fancy. That owner, and chef, is Fordinka Kanlic, and once you meet her — or see or hear her — it is immediately apparent why Drina Daisy is much like a small restaurant not far from the Adriatic. Both Kanlic and her cuisine are robustly Euro-Mediterranean. "Presentation may vary according to avail-



Dwight Caswell photos

Fordinka Kanlic, right, owner and chef of Drina Daisy, and her husband, Ken Bendickson, the restaurant's wait staff.



Dinner for four at Drina Daisy.

ability and mood," reads the menu, and a sign behind the bar advises, "Complaints to the Cook may be hazardous to your health."

A third-generation Bosnian chef, Kanlic began cooking professionally at age 8 in her grandmother's restaurant near Sarajevo, and became the first woman in Bosnia to obtain a license to open a restaurant. She cooks her grandmother's recipes, which her grandmother learned from her grandmother. Food doesn't get more authentic than this.

Not long ago, four of us met at Drina Daisy for dinner. We pored over our menus at length. The selection isn't immense, but it is more than sufficient. Starters like cold



Appetizers at Drina Daisy.

smoked beef and sausage. Several salads with traditional sour cream or lemon dressing. And the entrees! Stuffed cabbage leaves with meat or vegetables. Baked pitas (not what you may think pitas are, but filo dough pies stuffed with cheeses, vegetables or beef). Beef stew with paprika, and the dish the restaurant is best known for: Jagnijetina Na Rostiljn, choice cuts from a flame roasted lamb that has been rubbed with Mediterranean spices.

We were having trouble making up our minds when one of us asked Ken Bendickson, wait staff and husband to Fordinka, if the chef would create a platter for four of something he thought we would like. Soon, three large platters appeared, laden with salads, appetizers and most of the other menu items. With our beer, it all came to

DRINA DAISY BOSNIAN RESTAURANT

915 Commercial St., Astoria

503-338-2912

Hours: Wednesday through Sunday, lunch 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., dinner 3 to 8 p.m.

Price: \$\$

Service: Ken is usually the only server, so if it's crowded, have another glass of wine.

Vegetarian/Vegan Options: Heavy on the meat but good salads and a few vegetarian entrees.



A word of advice for Drina Daisy patrons.

about \$44 a head, and was well worth it; there were leftovers sufficient for the next day's dinner.

A prize of some sort should be awarded to anyone who recognizes even three items on the wine and beer lists, but they are well chosen and accurately described. Wines include Dingac ("donkey wine," from vineyards so steep they must be farmed with donkeys) and Zdrepeva Kru (Foil's Blood). Or try pilsners from Serbia, Slovenia, Croatia and Czechoslovakia — my favorite was piraat, or "pirate," a Belgian triple amber ale.

About dessert. There is only one, made by Kanlic herself, and it is the best baklava I have ever had. Not too sweet, and with a slight lemon flavor. Savor it with one of several teas or with a cup of exquisite Bosnian coffee. The Bosnians know something about coffee: Sarajevo introduced it to Europe 500 years ago.

Kanlic's food isn't complex, but the flavors sing. She takes simple ingredients and turns them into something marvelous. You'll need no other plans for the evening. Relaxing with friends and eating superlative food in this delightful slice of Bosnia will fill your stomach and your evening. **dw**