

IF YOU CAN'T WASH YOUR HANDS...

Carry **Clean Well**, a small plastic spray bottle of hand sanitizer made with 100 percent natural ingredients and no alcohol. It has a delicate aroma of citrus and fresh thyme, which is a natural antibacterial, and makes your hands feel soft. The famed Berkeley perfumer, Mandy Aftel, developed the scent. Cost is about \$3 for 245 sprays. I don't leave home without it. — *Patricia Unterman*

www.cleanwelltoday.com



DOSAS AT TIRUPATHI BHIMAS IN MILPITAS

Lovers of the south Indian snack masala dosas, the magically crisp/tender, impossibly thin, gigantically round pancake with a mound of turmeric yellow potato and onion filling plopped in the center, will travel great distances to find one. The large south Indian community in the South Bay doesn't have to go far. In Milpitas they flock to the large, utilitarian dining room of **Tirupathi Bhimas** where dosas flow out of the kitchen at a fast clip. I like the Mini-Tiffin (\$7.50), a silver tray with an excellent dosa, a metal bowl of idly — steamed dumplings — floating in sambar, a lentil-thickened vegetable soup and two chutneys. At the end, the waiter brings a metal tumbler of hot, milky, chicory-flavored Indian coffee. Add sugar. The menu offers the full array of snacks made with the same gently tart, fermented, ground rice and lentil batter as the dosas — idly and utthappam — plus a daily vegetable thali. But, the dosas are the thing here. They're well worth a journey. — *Patricia Unterman*

1208 S. Abel St., Milpitas (408) 945-1010 www.tirupathibhimas.com

RESTAURANT REVIEW » PATRICIA UNTERMAN

Pilita serves up delicious tastes of Turkey

Of all the lauded healthy Mediterranean diets, Turkish, for me, is the most scrumptious. It represents the best of Mediterranean cooking, full of vegetables, olive oil, yogurt, whole grains, fresh and wild greens, aromatic herbs, Eastern Mediterranean spices and just enough meat or fish to satisfy without heaviness. The preparations are vibrant.

Up until recently, there have been few Turkish restaurants in the Bay Area that capture the freshness and luminescence of this cuisine. Now we have Burak Epir's three-month-old Pilita in San Carlos, an airy, light-filled dining room that evokes the pretty meyhane on the coast, where diners linger over small plates of food and Turkish wine.

With a skillful hand, Epir captures the authentic flavors here. Eat like the Turks with a meze platter (\$12.95), a medley of appetizers including favorites like muerver, mint-scented zucchini fritters, which are especially good with thick yogurt seasoned with a whisper of garlic and studded with chewy whole wheat berries.

Epir's kisir, a salad of fine grained bulgur absorbs tons of flavor from his own pepper paste, cumin and parsley. It's the best version I've tasted. His eggplant salad, a clean, chunky mix with sweet peppers, has a haunting smoky aroma. Expertly balanced chickpea humus vies for best in class with velvety dried fava bean puree that gets enormous character just from garlic, lemon and extra virgin olive oil. The fava puree arrived warm one day, made



minutes before.

Epir's buoyant Turkish lamb musakka (\$15.95) is layered with vegetables and eggplant, and topped with a sparkling tomato sauce. The spiced ground lamb acts as a condiment.

Pilita cherry (\$14.95), a stew of tiny meatballs in a dark sauce infused with dried cherries, comes from Musa Dagdeviren, chef of the groundbreaking Istanbul restaurant Ciya. Epir met Dagdeviren, his inspiration, at a conference at the Culinary Institute of America in the Napa Valley and followed him back to Turkey.

Dagdeviren runs three restaurants close to each other on a narrow market street on the Asian side of Istanbul and one of them is a kebab house where Epir picked up some secrets. His Adana kebab (\$13.95) of ground beef and Pilita kebab (\$13.95) of ground lamb are dreamy. Every day he makes a special one, like Inegol kebab, of ground lamb shoulder and breast leavened with baking soda to achieve a particularly juicy and elastic texture. (The kebabs' names refer to the cities in Turkey where they originated.) All come with charred, thinly sliced grilled vegetables and fluffy basmati rice tossed with garbanzos. A table sauce of plumped Turkish sun-dried tomatoes and extra virgin olive oil lubricates



everything, including warm, house-baked bread.

Don't skip a milk pudding, kanzandibi (\$5.95), with a crackling burnt caramel top that makes each bite taste like toasted marshmallows. Kunefe (\$6.95), a crisp round cake of shredded filo filled with cheese, is delicately sweetened with honey syrup.

Of two Turkish red wines on a small list, I'd spring for the elegant, Rhone-like '03 Kale'cik Karasi (\$55), the most expensive wine on the list, but worth it.

Epir, who used to manage big residence hall kitchens at Stanford University, left three years ago to follow his muse and create Turkish food that tastes Turkish. A visit to his charming Pilita in San Carlos will transport you to the real place.

Burak Epir, Pilita's chef/owner, brings Turkey to the Bay Area. From top left, zucchini fritter, musakka, kebabs and the meze platter are menu highlights at Pilita. — All: Bret Putman/Special To The Examiner

Patricia Unterman is author of the "San Francisco Food Lovers' Pocket Guide" and a newsletter, "Unterman on Food." Contact her at pattiu@concentric.net.

PILITA

» **Location:** 680 Laurel St., San Carlos

» **Contact:** (650) 508-8960

» **Hours:** 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. and 5 to 9 p.m. Monday-Thursday, 11 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. and 5 to 10:30 p.m. Friday; noon to 3:30 p.m. and 5 to 10:30 p.m. Saturday; closed Sunday

» **Price range:** Mezes and salads \$5.95 to \$8.95; entrees and grills \$13.95 to \$17.95

» **Recommended dishes:** Fava puree, humus, zucchini pancakes, kisir, lamb musakka, Adana kebab, special kebab of the day, kunefe, milk pudding

» **Credit cards:** All major

» **Reservations:** Accepted

