

# The New York Times

## Grandmother's Recipes, Direct From Afghanistan



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By SCOTT VEALE

"FAMILY adds that extra touch." That simple notion, the bedrock of so many restaurants through the ages, resonates deeply coming from Hamid Rahin of [Pamiir](#), a beguiling Afghan restaurant just off the Morristown Green.

Thirty years ago, three of Mr. Rahin's uncles opened Pamiir on the Upper East Side of Manhattan after his family escaped from Afghanistan during the Soviet invasion in the late 1970s. The original Pamiir is gone, but this branch has been thriving in Morristown since 1988.

When his uncles retired nine months ago, Mr. Rahin, 28, along with his brother, Ahmad, 27, and a sister, Angela, 24, bought Pamiir and moved it to a more contemporary home. The cooking continues to be overseen by Farid Bayat, one of the retired uncles, and virtually all the recipes trace back to his mother, Mr. Rahin's grandmother.

Afghan cuisine "is nothing like Indian or Arabic," Mr. Rahin says. "It's almost a blend of Middle Eastern and Mediterranean food." But it is quite distinctive nonetheless. Most dishes are deeply but subtly infused with traditional Afghan spices like mint, coriander, saffron, cilantro, cardamom, pepper. It is hearty fare, but rarely overfilling.

Among the excellent appetizers are recognizable plates like hummus, jolted by a dash of paprika, and light, nearly spongy falafel. But plunge further. There are five kinds of bulanee, for example, which resembles a flat turnover. One is filled with scallions; others are stuffed with carrots, potatoes, **pumpkin** and feta; and all are served with yogurt and cilantro sauces. Don't miss the aushak, a kind of scallion dumpling in meat sauce, yogurt and mint, not to mention the pumpkin soup, sweet, pungent and unexpectedly filling.

Ask your servers — mainly young and all exceedingly friendly — for navigational assistance, because this is a place where taking chances will pay off. One caveat: you may find yourself yelling over the din when the restaurant is filled, though judging from several visits it seemed as if many diners were habitual visitors who needed little help.

The large space is handsome, with a front room facing French doors that open onto the sidewalk, a larger middle area and a back dining space set off by arches. The brick and mahogany interior is dimly lighted and sparsely furnished, making it a relaxing place to check out the food and the crowd, which ranges from earnest-looking young men with sculptured beards to large tables of middle-aged professionals enjoying bottles of expensive-looking wine.



Tom White for The New York Times

The mahi-e-anar, baked tilapia with carrots.

The entrees are heavy on lamb and chicken, and anchored by four main kinds of rice: chalow, white basmati rice; palaw, brown rice spiced with cardamom; saffron rice, sweetened with cooked orange strips, pistachios and almonds; and, best of all, quabilli palaw, richly flavored with cardamom, carrots, pistachios, raisins and almonds.

At the top of the list of entrees is mahi-e-anar, baked tilapia marinated in pomegranate sauce and topped with gingered carrots; the tartness of the pomegranate ricochets off the sweetness of the ginger carrots, to splendid effect.

The other two grilled fish dishes were a bit off the mark. An otherwise tasty brook trout in cilantro sauce was undermined by a lackluster topping of mushrooms and onions, and the salmon with dill and garlic was slightly overdone. But the kebabs were generally far more successful, especially the lamb and chicken, smoky and tender in their marinade of yogurt, garlic and onion.

Whatever you order, get a side of sabzi, puréed spinach with onion and spices — it goes well with virtually everything.

Among the desserts, the intensely sweet baghlawa is similar to its Greek cousin but prepared with orange-flavored syrup instead of honey. And firnee, a milk custard **pudding** with rosewater, pistachios and almonds, is a pleasant capper to a meal, accompanied by a cup of cardamom-flavored tea.

The restaurant's name refers to a remote mountain range in northern Afghanistan, but in the end, the experience hardly feels exotic. Pamir might as well mean "home cooking."

## **Pamir**

*11 South Street*

*Morristown*

*(973) 605-1095*

*[pamirrestaurant.com](http://pamirrestaurant.com)*

## **WORTH IT**

**THE SPACE** High-ceilinged room with well-spaced tables, open to the street in good weather. Eighty seats in the main restaurant, plus 15 on the sidewalk. The noise level can be loud. Wheelchair accessible.

**THE CROWD** A fairly multicultural mix of young and old.

**THE STAFF** Friendly and unflustered despite the noise and the frequent requests for substitutions.

**THE BAR** Bring your own wine or beer.

**THE BILL** Dinner entrees, \$15.50 to \$19.50. At lunch, **salads**, soups and wraps are \$4.95 to \$7.95; special platters, \$8.95 to \$9.95. Major credit cards accepted.

**WHAT WE LIKED** Hummus; bulanee gandana; aushak; mahi-e-anar; kebab-e-murgh (chicken kebab); quabilli palaw; lamb quorma.

**IF YOU GO** Lunch: Tuesday through Friday, 11:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Dinner: Tuesday through Sunday, 4:30 to 10 p.m. Reservations recommended. Parking is possible along South Street and near the green, but public parking in a lot or garage is also available in a pinch.

**RATINGS** Don't Miss, Worth It, O.K., Don't Bother.