

dine | TABLE TALK

BY DAVID HAGEDORN



Al Ha'esh Chef Daniel Yitzhaky (left) with Tracy Yitzhaky and Gideon Sasson

SKEWERED, ISRAELI-STYLE

AL HA'ESH, WHICH MEANS "on the fire" in Hebrew, is the kosher Israeli grill that replaced Moti's Grill in Rockville's Randolph Hills Shopping Center in January. How the restaurant came to be is a song of Solomon—Michael Solomonov, that is, a Philadelphia chef whose restaurant and cookbook, both named Zahav, are paeans to Israeli cooking.

The chef at Al Ha'esh, Daniel Yitzhaky, got a copy of the Zahav cookbook last year while finishing up his degree at L'Academie de Cuisine cooking school in Gaithersburg. "Solomonov tells great stories about Israeli grills," says Al Ha'esh owner Gideon Sasson, who also found the tome inspirational. "We Israelis love going to those grills, and I said, 'Huh! We can do this!'"

As research, Sasson and Yitzhaky took a 10-day trip to Israel, visiting eateries featuring skewers of proteins and vegetables grilled over charcoal and served with a dazzling array of cold side salads (*salatim*). That's the formula they brought back to Al Ha'esh, along with a signature seasoning blend that includes cumin, garlic, cilantro, paprika, coriander seed, black pepper and allspice. Sasson and business partner Tracy Yitzhaky (Daniel's mother) closed Moti's Grill last year and renovated it to create an inviting, light-filled, 88-seat space (plus seven at the bar and 24 outside) with an open kitchen that features a large charcoal grill.

Al Ha'esh was a hit from the start, and for good reason. Grilled skewers (such as chicken, lamb, beef, chicken livers, sweetbreads and seitan, a vegetarian meat substitute made from wheat gluten) or other entrées (including chicken schnitzel and a burger) come with a side dish and *salatim*. On a recent visit, the *salatim* included ramekins of tahini; beets with tahini; curried chickpeas; cucumber, tomato and red onion salad; marinated red cabbage; baba ghanoush; balsamic marinated mushrooms; pickles; tabouleh; and olives. Two-skewer plates at dinner cost \$19. Entrées range from \$11 (falafel) to \$28 (lamb chops).

Al Ha'esh, 4860 Boiling Brook Parkway, Rockville; 301-231-0839, al-haesh.com. Open Sunday–Thursday noon–2:30 p.m. and 5–8:30 p.m.; and Friday noon–2:30 p.m.

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OUR FAVORITE DISHES AT AL HA'ESH:

1. Hummus topped with (left to right) chickpeas and olive oil; merguez (lamb) sausage; sautéed mushrooms; and ground beef
2. Grilled rosemary-and-garlic-marinated lamb chops
3. Chicken liver skewers
4. Sautéed zucchini with tahini and za'atar, a Middle Eastern spice blend that includes sumac, sesame seeds, cumin, thyme and oregano
5. Grilled baby eggplant with tahini and bell peppers

PHOTOS BY MICHAEL VENTURA



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