

Ultimate Lebanese flavors inspire Birmingham's Phoenicia

BY ELEANOR & RAY HEALD
SPECIAL WRITERS

Since 1992, Phoenicia's owner Sameer Eid has delighted diners with his Lebanese cuisine, Middle Eastern and Mediterranean dishes. Such success does not come without daily dedication.

Eid is up at 5 a.m. six days each week. Like the best European chefs he's off to personally select cuts of lamb and other meat at Wolverine Packing Company in Detroit's Eastern Market. Frequently aided by his brother Walid, Sameer is not only head to the market in his own kitchen, but Maitre d' greeting diners like they were members of his private club.

How did Sameer begin his restaurant career? "In 1970 by mistake," he explained. "I was in the custom drapery business, but liked to eat at a Lebanese restaurant in Highland Park. The owner was from my mother's hometown in Lebanon. She wanted to close the restaurant and move out of the area. She suggested that I buy it. I did for \$5,700."

Since 1982 and relocation to Birmingham, Sameer has created a number of new dishes to blend Lebanese-style with American tastes. Salmon in Grape Leaves is one example. For this dish, fresh salmon fillet is topped with slices of fresh lime, fresh coriander and a slice of beefsteak tomato, then wrapped in grape leaves and broiled. Others examples are Sautéed Shrimp, Swordfish Kabob, Frog Legs, Scallops, a Mixed Grill (swordfish, scallops and shrimp marinated and char-broiled) and Whitefish Fillet, baked over a bed of fresh peppers, onions, beefsteak tomatoes and spinach, then seasoned with herbs and

Phoenicia
Where: 588 South Old Woodward, Birmingham (248) 644-3122.
Hours: 11 a.m. to 10:30 p.m., Monday-Thursday, until 11 p.m. Friday and Saturday.
Menu: Lebanese cuisine and Mediterranean specialties with particular emphasis on fresh seafood. Limited menu items with moderate prices at lunch. Many vegetarian choices at both lunch and dinner.
Full liquor license.
Cost: Lunch \$8-11. Dinner and broiler specialties average \$22.
Reservations: Accepted.
Credit cards: All majors accepted.
Carry-out: All items available as carry-out. Lunch time delivery to office buildings within four mile radius.
Phoenicia Uncorked
Sameer Eid recommends the following wines with specialty dishes:
Lamb Chops: 1991 Chateau Musar, Lebanon (a Bordeaux varietal blend).
Sausages: 1995 Clos du Val Cabernet Sauvignon, Napa Valley or 1996 Trefethen Eschol, Napa Valley.
Vegetarian dishes such as Grape Leaves or Mujdara: 1997 Rosemount Chardonnay from Australia.

olive oil.

At lunch, the non-traditional Pasta with Pesto Sauce is very popular.

"And believe it or not, we're known for our baby back ribs," Sameer noted. "They are the Monday night special." Phoenicia's version marinates the whole slab, seasons it then takes it to the broiler. Twice during the broiling, slabs are removed and re-introduced to the marinade and returned to the broiler. They are moist, but served "dry," the best way to enjoy them. A sauce is offered on the side.

Phoenicia's extensive dinner appetizer list appeals as a superb grazing menu, ideal for a large group to order several selections and share. Number one, most popular is homemade Sausages. Veal, lamb and ground Spanish pine nuts are stuffed in natural casing, seasoned and sautéed then served with pomegranate sauce. Finger-size, these sausages are not only unique, but bursting with flavor.

Other popular appetizer selections are Himmus, Baba Gannoug, Artichoke Hearts, and homemade Lebanese Cheese. Also a big favorite and one of Sameer's "suited to American taste" creations is Portobello Mushrooms, sautéed with fresh basil, garlic and olive oil served over a bed of fresh spinach.

Among char-broiled offerings are the traditional Lebanese prime Lamb Chops, trimmed of fat; Shish Kabob, very lean, tender lamb served with vegetables; and Shish Kofta, ground lamb with onions, parsley and seasonings.

Because prime lamb is king at Phoenicia, you have Sameer's assurance that Kibby Noyes, is



Delighting diners: Sameer Eid in the dining room of Phoenicia. Sameer is not only head to the market in his own kitchen, but Maitre d'. He greets diners like they were members of his private club.

freshly ground and very safe to eat as an uncorked delicacy.

But if you always eat meat cooked, Baked Kibby is an alternative.

The menu lists seven items under "For the Vegetarian." Grape Leaves stuffed with rice, vegetables and herbs, cooked in olive oil and lemon sauce, are as delicious as the ground lamb version.

A selection of desserts are available, but the rice pudding is quite special.

Plans are being drawn up by Birmingham architect Joe Savin to give Phoenicia an interior facelift. Near the end of this year, the restaurant will close for two weeks and open before the holiday season with a fresh look.

Keep reading the DINING page and we'll keep you informed.

But if you've never tried Phoenicia, don't wait until it's remodeled to taste ultimate Lebanese flavors.

Not only is Phoenicia the first Lebanese restaurant in Oakland County, it has become a Birmingham dining destination.

To leave a voice mail message for the Healds, dial (734) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, mailbox 1864.

WHAT'S COOKING

BY ELEANOR HEALD
SPECIAL WRITER

■ A Unique Harvest Dinner at Morels, A Michigan Bistro, 30100 Telegraph, Bingham Farms (248) 642-1094, 7 p.m. Thursday, Sept. 1 and Friday, Sept. 2. The cost is \$125 per person for a reception and five courses, wines included, but not tax and gratuity. In addition to wine selections by Master Sommelier Madeline Triffon, three Unique

Restaurant Corp. "sommeliers," who have passed the certificate course in the rigorous curriculum to become a Master Sommelier, have paired with a UIC chef to present an ultimate wine and food match for three of the courses. Michelle DeHayes of Northern Lakes Seafood Company and Kristin Zangrilli of Morels passed the certificate course this year. Rick Rubel of No. 1 Chop-house & Lobster Bar will soon

accept the challenge of achieving at the advanced level, the second of three steps of the London-based Court of Master Sommeliers, the only internationally recognized sommelier certifying association.

■ New menu at Zanzibar, 216 S. State Street, Ann Arbor (734) 994-7777 created by the sister-brother team of chefs Misty and

Todd Callies explores the sweetly aromatic and gently-flavored vegetables and pastas of the Mediterranean, the bounty of North American waters and gardens, and the grain-fed, corn-finished steaks and roasts of the Midwest along with the tropical theme loyal diners include as their favorites.

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Enjoy Gallery Talks on Sunday, August 29 at 2 p.m. & Friday, September 3 at 6 & 7:30 p.m. (open till 9 p.m. Sept. 3)
Free with museum admission.

This exhibition is sponsored by Ernst & Young LLP. Major support was received through the generosity of The Henry Ford Foundation. Additional funding was provided by the National Endowment for the Arts, a federal agency. Organized by The Jewish Museum, NY.

In Detroit the exhibition is made possible with support from the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural Affairs and the City of Detroit.

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