

‘Made from scratch’

It took only a day for chef Emin Tekin to fall in love with Chico. A friend teaching at Chico State invited the Bay Area restaurateur to the city last summer, and Tekin linked with property owner David Halimi through the mutual acquaintance. The pair got to talking about the restaurant space available at the old Pluto’s location downtown at the corner of East Second and Main streets, leading Tekin to open Oya Mediterranean Grill in that spot about two months ago. “It made me very happy that he had a location available,” he said. Tekin, who attended Le Cordon Bleu culinary school in San Francisco, has worked in the restaurant business since immigrating from eastern Turkey in 1999. He currently owns two restaurants—Oya and Oda Restaurant & Brewery in San Francisco—but he’s helped run several others with his brother over the last two decades. Oya offers up wraps and sandwiches—lamb and beef gyros, for example—as well as kebab plates plus vegan and vegetarian options. Visit [oyamediterraneangrill.com](http://oyamediterraneangrill.com) for menu options. Oya is open normally 11 a.m.–10 p.m. Mondays–Saturdays, and 11 a.m.–9 p.m. on Sundays. Tekin and Oya Manager Jon Monroe (pictured right and left, respectively) recently sat down with the CN&R to talk about the new venture, which Monroe hopes will capture the feel of the Middle East and become a cultural hub.



PHOTO BY ANDRE BYIK

What does Oya mean?

**Tekin:** Oya is anything hand-crafted, hand-touched, made from scratch. ... Our food is all handmade. We make everything from scratch. Nothing is from cans [or a] freezer. Everything is fresh. And Jon and I work very closely. He’s in the dining room and I’m in the kitchen. **Monroe:** There is always going to be something freshly made. Just come in and ask what the newest, freshest thing is. The other day it was kanafeh, which is a fantastic dessert handmade from top to bottom. Sometimes [Tekin is] building a gyro and it’ll just come out and it’ll be heating up and it’ll be the freshest slices of gyros you can get.

Why did you open in Chico?

**Tekin:** I love the community. People are very outgoing. Very friendly. I’m a family-oriented local business. ...

I [also] thought that Chico doesn’t have the right Mediterranean food. Not too formal, not casual. Not fast-foodie. I went to a few restaurants and I found out that [some] restaurants are all about just business. We’re more about hospitality.

What makes Oya stand out?

**Monroe:** I would say things like quality and service. We’re just trying to provide great Mediterranean food. ... I’ve seen [Tekin] get meats and just throw them away because they’re not great, they’re not perfect. He always tries to get the best meat he can find; and then the marinades on them. So, even the lamb and beef gyro—he’ll get meat, slice it, mix it ... and all of that is premarinated. Oh, it’s definitely a specialty. And the kebabs. Amazing.

—ANDRE BYIK  
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MARCH 19, 2020 CN&R 17