



them later that night, and the dessert was fantastic, still moist with honey syrup; it was a dreamy late-night snack.

All in all, the meal was magnificent. It's a bit on the pricey side compared with other local Mediterranean options, but given the overall dining experience, it was well worth it. Meze Moon now sits near the top of my list of local eateries for special occasions.

Man behind the moon

I returned to the restaurant the following Saturday afternoon to meet the owner, Emin Tekin, with whom my partner and I shared a few cups of Turkish coffee.

The conversation was frequently interrupted as Tekin was drawn away to greet a large lunch party; confer with an employee; accept an application from a potential employee; and pull the day's batch of lamb shank from the oven ("I slow cook it overnight to give it the special texture and flavor," he explained). Still, he was relaxed, welcoming and spoke about the importance of honest, kind and attentive hospitality.

Tekin is a veteran restaurateur who migrated to the United States from the Kurdistan region of Turkey in 1999. After attending Stanford University and Foothill College and working for several years as a dishwasher and line cook, he studied at the now-closed Le Cordon Bleu College of Culinary Arts in San Francisco.

He currently owns two other restaurants—another Mediterranean eatery and a brewery, both in San Francisco—and has run a handful of others (including Chico's short-lived Oya Mediterranean Grill, which was located just a few doors down from Meze

Dessert case with a variety of Turkish delight and baklava selections.

Moon and lasted about a year before becoming a casualty of the COVID-19 crisis). He said luminaries who've enjoyed his meals include former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and a Turkish president.

Tekin, who opened Meze Moon about two months ago, said he now lives in Chico full time. He spoke fondly of this area and expressed his desire and efforts toward making his latest venture a true community restaurant. To that end, he features local artists on the walls (the Hamsa series is the work of Michael Mulcahy); buys local ingredients from the Chico Certified Farmers' Market and other local outlets (all ingredients are sourced within a maximum 500-mile radius, he said); tithes a day's profits each month to charity; and aspires to contribute to and uplift Chico's dining and nightlife culture.

As an example of Tekin's commitment to hospitality, he agreed to read our coffee grounds, a skill he frequently shares (free of charge) with diners, and especially couples. After a disclaimer that the divination was done purely for entertainment and to share his culture, he asked us—one at a time—to place our left hand over the upturned coffee cup and make a wish.

After the reading, Tekin asked us to grade the veracity of his insight on a percentile scale. Overall, I'd say he hit our personalities at about a 70 percent rate; the other things he mentioned remain to be determined. While the future remains uncertain, one thing is 100 percent clear: Meze Moon offers a delicious, unique and even magical dining adventure. □

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