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Debbie Chang, left, and Tanya Azar, who have gone from serving and bartending at Kasbah to co-owners, have made an effort to focus on classic Middle Eastern dishes and wines since taking over in 2016.

PHOTO BY ANNE STOKES

Exotic evening on J Street

Kasbah delivers Middle Eastern fine dining and romantic ambiance

by Anne Stokes

With its arches and columns, cushioned banquette seats and warm copper tabletops lit by candlelight, Kasbah offers an evening that's like a romantic vacation right on J Street.

"We've had a lot of first dates here and some of them have gone on to get married and come back for their anniversaries," says co-owner Debbie Chang, who took over the restaurant with Tanya Azar in 2016. "We love that people consider us a destination, not only as a neighborhood restaurant ... but also to celebrate."

Both Chang and Azar have worked at Kasbah for more than a decade — first as servers and bartenders, then managers and now as owners. Originally known as a late-night hookah lounge and tea room, Kasbah has evolved into a fine-dining restaurant. Chang and Azar have focused more attention on Kasbah's dining and drink menus: Classic Middle Eastern fare

inspired by Azar's family recipes paired with Chang's creative house cocktails that change with the seasons. Also featured are international spirits and wines from Lebanon, Armenia, Turkey, Morocco and Palestine.

"My mom used to make shushbarak, kefta kabob, soups — she was really big into soups ... small type of salads, olives, pickles, the mezzas," says Azar. "That was always on our table for lunch and dinner, even breakfast."

While Kasbah's menu features plenty of delectable chicken, beef and lamb, there are ample savory and sweet vegetarian and vegan options.

"Middle Eastern and Mediterranean food naturally lends itself toward veganism," Chang says. "One of our most popular items is our vegan seitan gyro; we make the seitan in house ... it's really something you can sink your teeth into and it's super satisfying. None of our vegan menu is an afterthought."



Visit Kasbah for lunch or dinner, Tuesday through Sunday at 2115 J St., Sacramento. Check out their menu at www.kasbahlounge.com or call 916-442-4388 for hours or reservations.