

EATING OUT

Brandywine Restaurant: From seed to plate

by Marie Biondolillo

Five years ago, Azizi Tookas and Chris Sunde started growing heirloom tomatoes and selling them at the Bellingham Farmer's market under the name Brandywine Gardens. They grew into Brandywine Kitchen, a catering service and weekly booth offering tasty sandwiches at the Bellingham Farmers Market. In July, Tookas and Sunde opened their Brandywine Kitchen restaurant in Bellingham.

"We are doing much better at this time than we expected [we would], and that can only be attributed to the response that the community has had," Tookas said. "We are getting lots of good feedback from customers in the restaurant and at the market."

Brandywine Kitchen adopts a culinary philosophy called "From Seed to Plate," which has struck a chord with the local community.

"From Seed to Plate' is a motto that encompasses both our history and our belief that understanding and supporting local food systems leads to a superior product," Tookas said. "In addition to growing heirloom tomatoes currently, we also source local produce and other locally-grown products, which allows us to use the freshest products, make personal relationships with farmers, and keep money circulating in the community."

Brandywine Kitchen has a family-friendly atmosphere with casual counter service,

but they also have a bar that serves beer and wine.

"We organized the tables in a layout that gives it more of a 'community' feel," Tookas said. "We loved the idea of having people order at the counter instead of having customers be 'waited' on."

Paintings by local artist Ruthie V. break up the Brandywine Kitchen's brick and sunflower-yellow walls, and its dark, shining woodwork gleams.

"We inherited a restaurant space that was previously fine dining, and the décor matches that," Tookas said. "So, in opening, we had to make small adjustments to the space to give it a feel of comfort."

Tookas and Sunde made another smart move when designing Brandywine Kitchen's menu. They serve a tried-and-true selection of tempting edibles that includes lots of hearty fare and vegetarian options. This strategy comes from Tookas and Sunde's experiences at the Bellingham Farmer's Market, where they have been selling prepared foods under the Brandywine Kitchen name

since 2008.

"Much of the menu comes from our years at the farmer's market trialing different recipes," Tookas said. "The Bellingham Farmer's Market is a wonderful place to see what works and doesn't, by getting direct feedback from customers."

Brandywine Kitchen has also done catering since 2008, and this contributed to shaping the menu as well. Their amazing array of sandwiches, which includes a portabella and wild mushroom melt, a deluxe BLT with maple-tomato relish, a sherry-marinated steak banh mi and a bison French dip.

Brandywine Kitchen also serves starters, salads, soups, desserts and entrées. Hand cut, Belgian-style fries are served with basil, celeriac or red pepper aioli, and entrees include mac & cheese, chicken pot pie, rockfish & chips and wild salmon and quinoa cakes. Gluten-free options include the sandwiches and several of the dishes.

The menu definitely reflects the savvy that Tookas and



Co-owners Azizi Tookas and Chris Sunde use a variety of locally grown and raised food and drink, and feature a list of local producers inside the restaurant. PHOTO BY BECCA SCHWARZ COLE

Sunde gained from their time at other successful Bellingham restaurants. "Both Chris and I have worked for many years in the restaurant industry in Bellingham," Tookas said. "Before opening Brandywine Kitchen, we worked as kitchen managers at La Fiamma and Old Town Café, where we honed our knowledge of food, as well as learned the business side of things."

Brandywine Kitchen participated in the Bite of

Bellingham in August, and are a part of Sustainable Connections' Eat Local Week' in mid-September.

Brandywine Kitchen is located at 1317 Commercial St. in Bellingham. For more information, visit brandywinekitchen.com or call (360) 734-1071.

Marie Biondolillo lives in Bellingham and writes about food and pop culture for YouAreWeAre.com.

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