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Restaurant Review: Just Around Every Corner

Chloe (Minjoo) Kim

At first, we could not find it. Instead of the bustling metropolis which surrounds it, Sansom Street was empty and quiet. It was disconcerting. We started walking, but the only restaurant that was visible had a chic black and white sign that said Abe Fisher. After a few seconds, we finally saw it. Bright orange striped awnings, with a pink sticker that read ‘Dizengoff.’ Despite the vibrant colors, Zahav chef Michael Solomonov’s restaurant did not stand out. It was stuck in between two wide, old buildings. The narrow storefront seemed out of place. At the same time, the restaurant pulled me in, like a forgotten Philadelphia local’s secret.

I pushed the light glass-paned door, leading my nervous friends inside. The first thing that caught me was not anything that I saw. It was not the smell either. It was the music. The store was playing Childish Gambino’s “California.” Far from the generic Arab music that I heard time and time again when I entered other Middle Eastern restaurants, the cheery beat that evoked Californian summers was unexpected, yet refreshing. It gave the whole room a youthful atmosphere, and I no longer felt anxious.

That did not mean that Dizengoff was something ordinary. Dizengoff definitely had a distinctive look. To my right was a wall covered with red, green, and mirror tiles that were reminiscent of ancient mosaics with a modern twist. The ceiling was exposed with gray pipes and minimalistic

lighting. It was not mimicking any stereotypes of Israel. In fact, if it were not for the colorful posters in Hebrew, the store would almost seem like a hybrid between Shake Shack and a SoHo cafe.

There were no waiters; only the cashier in the back welcomed us. Before ordering, we first looked for seats. What was truly fascinating was that Dizengoff seemed caught in between a food stall and a diner. The only tables inside were wooden picnic tables. We chose one closest to the kitchen to take a peek at how chefs prepared the pitas. We looked around the table, trying to take note, and drank some cold water from the pink plastic pitchers. Everything inside was sunny and cheerful, a break from the old glamor of Center City.

“What should we eat?” I asked my friends. They insisted that I pick everything. I was just as clueless as they were, but after a deep breath, I approached the cashier, intending to go through a long list of dishes that I was not familiar with.

The cashier was wearing a gray Dizengoff T-shirt, which again caught me off guard. I would expect to find those T-shirts at Soul Cycle, not at a small hummus shop. Regardless, he was smiling widely, eager to listen to what I was going to order, so I quickly asked him for a menu, and a few recommendations that I could try. He cheerily replied, “Of course! We do not have a separate menu, but all the dishes are listed right above you.”

The menu was shockingly simple. The only type of meal that they had was hummus, with different toppings such as chicken, green bean hazelnut, or cauliflower almond. I could add the pitas, eggs, or chips. He suggested that I go with the tahini and the chicken, and add the eggs. I took his advice.

The food soon came out on plastic trays. The pitas were wonderfully toasted, straight from the oven. The tahini and the chicken were placed at the center of the creamy hummus, perfectly seasoned. There also was a side dish of beets and small pickles. The rich hues of the beets and the herbs just delighted our eyes. We started off by using forks, but soon enough, went in

with our hands. As we listened to David Bowie’s “Fame,” we chewed, nibbled, and wiped our plates clean.

The food was not anything extravagant. Dishes were not decorated with lavish garnishes, and the ingredients were not rare. The plates did not have any intricate designs, and there were not any tuxedoed waiters looking over us.

Yet, it was special. The hilarious conversations I had with my friends as we shared the food, the constant hum of the pita oven and kitchen, the familiar hip-hop, and the tranquility of life outside of Penn all contributed to the experience.

That is what Dizengoff was to me. It was somewhere that you expect to find at every corner, but you do not. It was familiar enough for you to feel safe, yet special enough to remember. Dizengoff, like Solomonov described, would be one of the hummus stalls (*hummusiyas*) you could find on any Tel Aviv street. But we were not in Israel — we were in Philly. And Dizengoff was right in the middle of the two: a little getaway to Israel in the center of Center City. No wonder we all promised each other to come back.

Chloe (Minjoo) Kim is a freshman in Wharton. She is from Seoul, Korea, but she only lived half her life there. Her greatest vice is bios.