

DINING | WESTBURY

## Familiar Mediterranean: From Salads to Seafood



Dan Neville for The New York Times

VIBRANT White tablecloths add to the ambiance at Azerbaijan Grill.

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DESPITE its rather exotic name, the Azerbaijan Grill in Westbury serves familiar fare, with grilled fish, kebabs, phyllo, feta, hummus and eggplant defining the cuisine.

In a small strip mall on Old Country Road, the restaurant is a fairly large storefront with white tablecloths, carpeting and paintings of street scenes and vineyards in vibrant colors that almost jump off the sage-green walls.

Service is lackadaisical. One night our waiter, who was also the host, was elsewhere greeting and seating newcomers while we waited to give our order. On a return visit we had a very amiable waiter who promptly took our drink order but then forgot to place it. Another sign of the staff's nonchalance: the runners delivering the food didn't know who ordered what.



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Grilled baby lamb chops with a Greek salad.

This careless attitude was also evident at dessert time. The creamy cheesecake and rich chocolate layer cake both contained ice crystals. The chocolate cake was also partly frozen when we ordered it on another night. (The baklava, however, was excellent.)

On Monday through Thursday diners get a price break, with 11 entrees that cost \$12.95; on the weekends the same dishes are \$1 to \$3 more. (At that time, too, there are cloth napkins, not the paper ones in evidence on weeknights.) Every entree comes with white or brown rice; for \$2.50 more, diners can trade up to grilled vegetables, any salad on the menu or a choice of three types of basmati rice: prepared with cherries, dried cranberries or baby lima beans and dill. Certain entrees like lamb chops, whole striped bass and specials are not included on the list of \$12.95 entrees.

The food is definitely better than the service. We were happy with nearly everything we ordered. Baba ghanouj, the smooth roasted eggplant spread, had a wonderfully smoky flavor. Another eggplant appetizer, buranee Badenjan, consisted of three huge warm slices of eggplant topped with tomato sauce and a dollop of yogurt. Spinach pie was flaky, light and flavorful and a better bet than the sigara borek, pan fried phyllo rolls stuffed with feta and herbs, in which the cheese overwhelmed the pastry.

The best salad is the shirazi, a medley of diced cucumber, red onion, tomato and parsley in a light vinaigrette. The Greek salad, with greens, [tomatoes](#), cucumbers and creamy feta, took second place. The Azerbaijan salad, similar to the Greek salad without the feta, and the tabbouleh salad of cracked wheat, green onion and herbs were average.

A whole branzino in a lemon-garlic sauce, a special one night, was flaky perfection. So, too, was the boneless brook trout on the menu. Another smart seafood choice — this one on the \$12.95 menu — was the kebab of eight firm shrimp.

A special of two lamb shanks in a tasty tomato sauce was good and tender, with the meat falling from the bone, but the accompanying limp fried potato rounds were not. Lamb chops passed muster, as did the adana kebab, a flavorful cylinder of chopped lamb, onion, parsley and garlic.

A side dish of grilled vegetables is worth the extra \$2.50, including green peppers, zucchini, mushrooms, eggplant, onion and tomato. The \$2.50 charge for a salad (instead of rice) is another good option and an economical way to try some of the excellent choices, especially the shirazi.

With a bit of attention to service and to details like the frozen cakes and limp potatoes, the Azerbaijan Grill would be a much better restaurant. For the most part, the food is already there.