

FOOD & WINE + DRINKS NEIGHBORHOOD GUIDE UNCATEGORIZED

Balade East Village Merges the Authentic Flavors of Lebanese and Middle Eastern Cuisines

BY ADORA TROSTLE AUGUST 19, 2021



Balade is the Lebanese word for “produce of the highest quality.” And that’s what diners can expect at Balade in the East Village. Chef/Restaurateur Roland Semaan is a native of Beirut, Lebanon’s Capital City. His interest in hospitality started in the kitchen of his childhood home in Lebanon as he watched his mother and grandmother cook. His father was a diplomat, and the family home was the host site of elaborate dinner parties that welcomed political guests from around the world.

At eighteen, he traveled to Le Bouveret, Switzerland where he attended Cesar Ritz College and studied hotel and restaurant management. After graduating, he went to Dubai for a year to work in the hotel industry. He then came to the United States to attend Johnson and Wales University in Providence, Rhode Island where he earned his master’s in culinary arts. From there, Semaan moved to New York City where he began his career at Great Performances, a catering and events company managing the company’s large-scale events. He then took a management position with the Atlantic Grill, part of B.R. Guest hospitality. From there, he went to work at the Hilton Hotel in Times Square to serve as food and beverage director. During his tenure at Atlantic Grill, Semaan’s entrepreneurial spirit guided him to develop his own restaurant concept. He found the perfect location in the East Village and returned to his Lebanese roots with the opening of Balade restaurant in 2010. “That was my mission,” said Semaan. “To introduce Lebanese cuisine to New Yorkers.” The restaurant has since become an East Village staple serving the neighborhood and destination clientele.



Executive Chef: Chef Micheline Wakim was a home cook before she was recruited by Semaan to work as sous chef of Balade. Over time, Semaan trained her as she honed her cooking skills and learned to re-imagine his family recipes passed down from generations. Wakim was promoted to executive chef and Omar Douad, a native of Jordan, joined the team as chef de cuisine. Douad brought his Middle Eastern background to round out the menu with more vegetarian choices and adding more traditionally served larger platters typical of Middle Eastern tradition.

Dinner can begin with a spread of savory, shareable plates called Mezze. Jwneh are chargrilled chicken wings that are marinated for 48 hours with Balade proprietary spices and imported olive oil from Lebanon; Mouhmara, freshly-ground red peppers and walnuts topped with pomegranate; Makaneh beef sausages flamed table side with fresh lemon juice.



Family-style platters like the Supreme Mixed Grill is served covered in Balade’s famous house-made bread and edged-open to reveal a medley of grass-fed beef kofta, lamb kabab, chicken tawook, and lamb chops served with chargrilled vegetables. The Samke Mechwiye is a whole grilled branzino, bone-in, marinated in lemon, olive oil and salt served with tahini dipping sauce. Djaj Al Fahem is a half chicken marinated with their Balade’s signature recipe of fresh herbs and spices served with hand-cut fries.



Manakish, or Lebanese Pizza, is kneaded with fresh dough. Signature pie Lahme Baajin is crafted from house-made seasoned ground-lean beef, mixed with finely diced tomatoes and onions. Jebene is made from a combination of white cheeses served with a side of tomato slices.

An alternative to Lebanese pizza is “Pita Pita.” Created by Semaan, this kind of pizza yields a crispier crust. The Sultan El Shawarma is made with thinly-sliced marinated beef and roasted with onions, cucumbers, tomatoes, and topped off with a drizzle of tahini and a pinch of a spicy mixture called za’atar.

Desserts

Ashta consists of “white pudding,” a rich cream traditionally made by repeatedly skimming the film that appears on the surface of boiled milk. The pudding is then coated with honey and topped with pistachio and fresh strawberries. Moughallabie is a recipe handed down from his grandmother. It consists of a milk pudding topped with ground pistachios and orange blossom. Lebanese Ice Cream is available in pistachio and vanilla made from rose water.

A well-curated wine list consists of mostly red and white wine imported from Lebanon, France and Italy. Their beer selections come from Lebanon, Jordan, Turkey and Morocco.

Design

The interior design reflects the culture of Lebanon adorned with circular cut pieces of wooden cedar trees and Arabesque tiles – all imported from Lebanon. Outdoor seating is added with transparent partitions, picnic tables and chairs, and astro turf. Hardcover cookbooks line a top shelf above the outdoor dining area.



Takeout and Delivery hours are Saturday and Sunday from 12pm – 12am and Monday through Friday from 5 pm to 12 am. Delivery platforms include Uber Eats, Caviar, Grubhub, Postmates, and Delivery.com

Balade offers catering. The catering menu can be viewed [here](#).
Balade is located at 208 First Avenue, East Village, NY 10009
Their website address is www.baladerestaurants.com.
Their phone number is 212.529.6888.
@baladenyc is their Instagram handle
Their hours of operation are
Monday–Friday 5pm–12am; Saturday and Sunday from 12pm–12am
Their Main Dining Room seats 60 and their Bar seats 7 people
They have 20 outdoor seats.

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