



## TWIP KITCHEN

### Philistia Restaurant



I have been in love with the idea of *soul food* for a very long time. The concept of food that is cooked and served not only to nourish a hungry body but also a hungry soul is, to me, tantalizing. And when I think of soul food, I immediately think of my mother's *msakhan* or my grandmother's *waraq dawaly o koosa*. Rarely do I think of a restaurant's slab of medium-rare steak. But a few months ago that changed. Have you heard of Philistia?

Ramallah has a new eatery, surprise surprise! You may go ahead and roll your eyes! But Philistia, the new bistro-like restaurant located on Khalil Al Wazeer Street, Al-Masyoon, is – dare I say – different. Philistia's owner, Yousef Abu Taa, is a seasoned restaurateur who spent years running a successful business in Washington, DC. He recently returned home to Ramallah, Palestine. The name Philistia refers to the Philistines, an ancient people who migrated from Crete to Philistia. Yousef and his team do their best to capture the name in their décor. Greeted with a wooden antique-looking gate at the entrance, customers will enjoy the tiny symbols that pay tribute to Palestine's past set in its contemporary present. Hebron tiles adorn its walls, and small hand-blown Hebron-glass vases pepper the place and capture light in various colors.

Other than its rustic décor, what sets Philistia apart from the other establishments in Ramallah is that it is not concerned with serving the chef's latest artistic interpretation of New York steak or fusion dishes that bring together a variety of international cuisines. It is dedicated to serving Palestinian cuisine in all its glory. Dishes such as *shushbarak*, *karshat*, *rishtaya*, and *maftool* are just some examples of the hearty, soul-warming food served at Philistia.

If you are a sucker for hot, steaming *maftool* on any day of the year, not just wintery, cold, dreary days, then give this dish a serious try. Served with grilled chicken so tender it melts in your mouth, and complemented with hot broth rich with garbanzo beans and onions, this dish can melt any frozen heart.

Philistia serves its food in handmade brown glazed Palestinian pottery. This is soul food with a homemade quality, the kind of food served at Friday family lunches or Sunday dinners; the kind of food created with the love and passion of a matriarch who infuses her cooking with stories and wisdom. It should come as no surprise to anyone that Philistia's main chef is exactly that, a mother who cooks from the bottom of her heart, Um Ziad.

If you stop by on a Thursday night, you are in for an even bigger treat. As you dive into a dish of Palestinian soul food, you can enjoy the beautiful tenor sound of Munther Al Rai as he belts out songs of times that have passed, capturing the good old days ever so briefly in the fast-paced, busy today.