

FOOD + DRINK

Critic's Notebook: Quick-serve Indian and Turkish eateries

Kati Roll Wala in Clifton Park and Legends Kebab in Colonie offer chance to try less-familiar foods from India, Turkey

By **Susie Davidson Powell**
Nov 28, 2023



At Kati Roll Wala, the first upstate location of a chain of quick-serve Indian restaurants, customers can build salads, rice bowl or wraps from a variety of ingredients.
Susie Davidson Powell/For the Times Union

I'm always on the lookout for dishes previously hard to find upstate. My enthusiasm was piqued, for example, when Umana Yana in Albany added Ethiopian stews and injera bread in 2015 and my discovery the following year of Oaxaquena Triqui in the back of an Albany bodega. In this Critic's Notebook, I'm excited about two new additions to the dining scene where you'll find Kolkata-style kati rolls and Turkish pide.



Kati Roll Wala

309 Clifton Park Center Road, Clifton Park; 518-280-3981 and katirollwala.com

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Kati rolls are a popular street food in Kolkata, with grilled, skewered meats ("kati"). Indian spices and chutneys wrapped in soft paratha bread as a handheld snack. In the U.S., The Kati Roll Co. opened in New York City in 2002, expanding to four city locations, followed by London and, soon, Dallas. But in 2019, newcomer Kati Roll Wala burst on the scene with a broader array of hand rolls, protein bowls and sides in Houston and Richmond, Texas; Wilmington, Del.; and now, with the latest franchisee, in Clifton Park. Taking over a former Smashburger next to Nothing Bundt Cakes in Clifton Park Center, Kati Roll Wala ("wala" loosely translates to "vendor" in Hindi) is modern and colorful, befitting a fast-casual chain, but adorned in Indian art. It's banking on Indian flavors in fast, fresh wraps and rice bowls.

Not since desi pizza hit the upstate scene with naan or American-style pies topped with aloo gobi and masala has there been such a clear fusion of U.S. food and global flavor. Those desi pizzas are at Kati Roll Wala as either chicken or paneer tikka naan. But Kati Roll Wala is closer to Chipotle or Hawaiian poke bowl concepts, where you choose rice or salad as your base, top it with proteins, add-ons and sauces, or roll up the lot, burrito-style.

The fledgling Clifton Park franchise is owned by Dimpal Patel, a Regeneron employee who relocated from New Jersey to the Capital Region and saw a market opening for a fast-casual Indian among the takeout chains already in Clifton Park. The Kati Roll franchise held particular appeal for Patel given its focus on antibiotic- and hormone-free chicken, halal meats, hand-ground spices and fresh yogurt and produce. As a franchisee, Patel is provided with the recipes, which her kitchen team prepares daily. The result is fresh, light and fast, whether taking out or dining in.

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Kati rolls in over a dozen flavors like paneer tikka (Indian cheese in spicy tandoori curry), chicken tikka, aloo gobi (cauliflower and potatoes) or spicy keema egg (minced lamb cooked with 28 spices on a fluffy omelet) are wrapped in warm, pillowy roti bread in two sizes (\$6.50 to \$14.49). Similar toppings can go on a salad or rice wala bowl (\$7.99 and \$9.99) with crunchy chickpeas, cucumber, onion, yogurt and mint-cilantro chutney. Tandoori wings — or crispy fried barbecue or Buffalo wings, if you must — are beautifully seasoned and slightly charred with taut skin snap. Add samosa bites, masala-topped fries or dessert gulab jamun to any kati roll or bowl as a combo, or split pani puri, samosa chaat and samosa apps with a friend.

Skip the standard soda fountain and try their Indian street drinks, which go beyond the mango and rose lassi you already know. Try lemon shikanji, a saffron-cumin lemonade; kesar thandai, a milky, health-supporting drink made with almonds, rose, fennel seeds and pepper; meetha aam panna, a spiced green mango drink said to aid digestion; or rose sharbat, made with rose petals and recommended for stress and anxiety relief.

Legends Pizza & Kebab

98 Wolf Road, Colonie; 518-992-1111 and legendskebab.com

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Hours: 10 a.m. to 1 a.m. Monday to Thursday and Sunday, 10 to 2 a.m. Friday and Saturday

When I saw a photo from Legends Pizza with boat-shaped dough filled with cheese, I thought for a moment it might be Georgian khachapuri. Instead, it turns out to be Turkish pide, a shallower version common across Turkey, Lebanon, Jordan and elsewhere in the Middle East, from the new Turkish menu at Legends Pizza. Legends opened six months ago as a pizzeria in Sand Lake Plaza off Wolf Road, but they quickly rolled out a full Turkish menu as Legends Kebab. The sign out front still says Legends Pizza, but you're in for a treat, though limited seating, once you walk in the door. Choose from grilled kebab platters, shish, kofte and shawarma meals, or peruse the counter's cold salads including baba ganoush, hummus, spicy ezme red salsa, smoked eggplant and Russian salad made with chopped potato, mayo, egg and peas.

Ayman Khalil, a Jordanian immigrant whose wife is from Turkey, has owned Amante Pizza in Troy since 2015 and in December will reopen the historic Natty Pine, a Troy dining fixture since 1946, as Pizza 88, a sit-down pizzeria. Khalil's three brothers studied engineering at RPI, where his father also received his doctorate, but Khalil studied sociology in Jordan before moving to the Capital Region in 2007.

If pizza is the common link across all three locations, the differing names speak to distinct identities: Fans of Amante Pizza rave about American pizza with gyro toppings including chicken or beef shawarma, pepper, mushrooms and dill-yogurt gyro sauce, as well as housemade baklava. The future Pizza 88 will feature Italian pastas and mac-and-cheese as well as made-to-order crepes and waffles customizable with Nutella, chocolate and fruits. But Legends Pizza has so vastly expanded their Mediterranean options that they run twin menus: Legends Pizza and Legends Kebab.

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Go for thin, crispy lavash bread sold with yogurt sauce, or as lahmajoun — a sort of ultra-thin Turkish pizza — topped in ground meat, veggies and homemade spices with crunchy lettuce, onion and tomatoes to roll inside. Try sesame and oregano-scented zaatar or cheese manakeesh, falafel or chicken or beef shawarma wrap shaved from slow-spinning spits and folded inside with tomatoes, onions and yogurt sauce. You might think shawarma, a Middle Eastern street food of Turkish origin, is similar to Greek gyros, but both are offshoots of the Turkish doner kebab.

Still, we came for pide, an oval-shaped dough with twisted ends filled with cheese and meat (kiymali) and topped, if you ask, with an egg. It's not as gooey as Georgian khachapuri, instead baked and sliced in strips to share or dunk into your hummus or baba ganoush. Worth the trip.

Nov 28, 2023



By **Susie Davidson Powell**

Award-winning food and drinks writer and longtime Times Union dining critic Susie Davidson Powell has covered the upstate dining scene for a decade. She writes weekly reviews, a monthly cocktail column, and The Food Life subscriber e-newsletter. Susie has received national awards for food criticism from the Society of Features Journalism and co-produced Kitchen Raid (Hearst), an armchair travel and cooking subscription featuring chefs and restaurants in the Capital Region and Hudson Valley. You can reach her at thefoodlifetu@gmail.com and follow her on Instagram: @susiedp.

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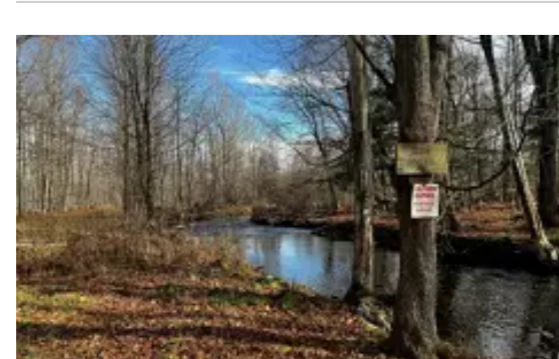
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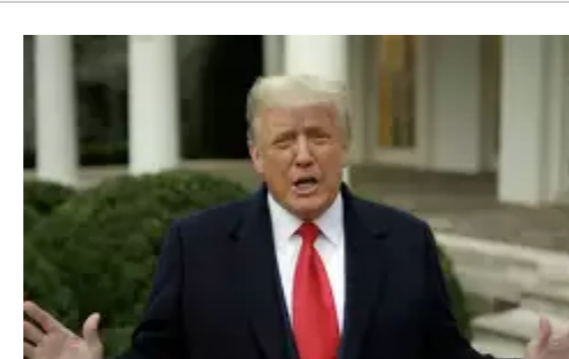
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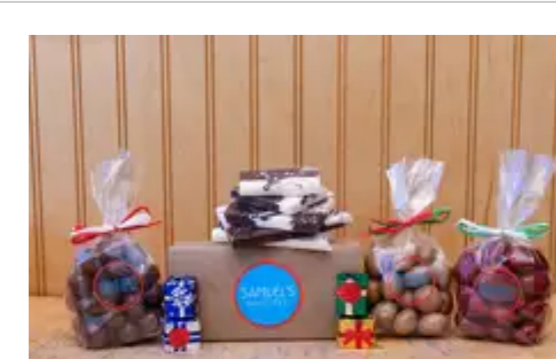
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