

# DIPLOMATIC POUCH

an email newsletter produced by The Washington Diplomat

## Culinary series showcases rich history of Turkish cuisine

by Liz Lizama

On Aug. 19 the Turkish Embassy's cultural and tourism office — along with Turkish Airlines, home furnishings retailer Williams-Sonoma and the American Turkish Association — hosted the third Turkish Cuisine Tales at Georgetown's Café Divan.

The series, which began earlier this year, aims to promote Turkish culture and its unique cuisine through cooking demonstrations and tastings. The 25 or so people in attendance enjoyed a Turkish buffet dinner, which included a traditional dish of lamb and beef served with salad, rice and pita bread.



***From left, Gorkem Kusunlu Karakus of the Turkish Embassy's cultural and tourism office; Muge Karsli, host of the TV cooking show "Feast Delight" and Gizem Salcigil White, president of the American Turkish Association of Washington, D.C., demonstrate Turkish cuisine Aug. 19 at Georgetown's Café Divan. Photos: Liz Lizama***

“Turkish culinary is not only about food. It reveals the great Turkish history tales,” said Gorkem Kursunlu Karakus, the embassy’s culture and tourism counselor. “Due to its geographical position and cultural heritage, Turkish cuisine has been influenced by Europe, by Asia and the Balkans.”

Muge Karsli, creator and host of the TV cooking show "Feast Delight," then demonstrated recipes for two traditional Turkish dishes: borek, a spinach pastry, and sekerpare, a sweet dough-based cookie.



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“Dough-based dishes have such a foundation in Turkish cuisine,” Karsli said, explaining that Turks living during the Ottoman Empire 500 years ago ate only two meals a day. “It was very important that they had a big, hearty breakfast to keep them till dinner, so they had a lot of dough-based dishes. They even ate pasta, a lot of these cheese pastries or any type of pastries to keep them full throughout the day.”

Karsli also demonstrated how to make sekerpare.

“Syrup-based desserts were all created in the Ottoman Empire era, starting with baklava,” she said. “A whole different variety of this dessert was created throughout the Ottoman Empire. The Balkans and the Middle East have their different versions of this dessert.”



***Muge Karsli, host of the TV cooking show “Feast Delight,” prepares traditional Turkish desserts Aug. 19 at Georgetown’s Café Divan.***

Williams-Sonoma then presented its Iznik dinnerware collection. Each year, the company travels around the world and selects a different region of focus for culinary inventors. This year, the retailer selected Turkish culture, introducing a limited-edition collection of plates, bowls and other home goods influenced by Iznik pottery from western Anatolia.

Beginning with simple cobalt bowls of blue and white in the late 15th century, designs and colors evolved over time, expanding to turquoise, sage and red — appearing much like the vibrant Iznik collection displayed at the event, which ended with a coffee tasting.

In Turkey, a cup of coffee is more than just a caffeine boost; it’s also a method of fortune-telling. In a centuries-old custom, one places the saucer over the coffee cup and flips the cup over so the grounds at the bottom of the cup cool and fall on the plate. The shapes that remain reveal one’s fortune.