



Jennifer Levin | The New Mexican

EAT, EAT

A multicultural Hanukkah feast at Marquez Deli

Consider the humble latke: just a pancake made of shredded potato, onion, egg, maybe some flour that's fried to a golden-brown, crispy texture in plenty of oil. Symbolizing the miracle of Hanukkah, latkes (pronounced LOT-keh) are gobbled up with glee by celebrating Jewish people and their loved ones every December, as menorah candles flicker brightly in the background. But they aren't without controversy, because the exact recipe, cooking method, and consistency of latkes differs from home to home and family to family. Should they be small or large? Puffy or flat? Crispy all the way through or mushy inside? Such debates have raged for generations.

And what of alternative ingredients, like (God forbid) sweet potatoes or zucchini? Did you know

that Sephardic Jews in Algeria, for instance, add green onions and leeks to the mix? To a Chicago-born Ashkenazi Jew such as myself, this sounds like it would taste good, but also like it could be a recipe for chaos. How in the world do you shred leeks on a box grater?

"You don't. You use a blender or a food processor," said Alex Hadidi, chef-owner of Marquez Deli (513C Camino de los Marquez, 505-365-2112, marquezedeli.com). "When we cook latkes, they are a little bit puffy. We don't add flour. You want the inside to be nice and moist. They're not like Ashkenazi latkes, which are more like hash browns."

Hadidi, 58, grew up on the coast of northern Algeria, in Tizirt Sur-Mer. His English is accented by French, Croatian, Serbian, and Berber, and his

Hanukkah recipes are influenced by Sephardic and Mediterranean Jewish traditions. He went to college in the former Yugoslavia, and he was a biomedical engineer in Minnesota before training as a chef at the French Culinary Institute and working in New York for 25 years. He moved to Santa Fe in 2012.

"I love the respect the people of the state have for food," he said. "It's almost like you're closer to God ..." He gestured to indicate the City Different's high altitude. "So, you have to respect freshness. In New York City, you have the trends, the stress, the buildings. But here, your whole heart, your mind, is all around food."

Until mid-October, Marquez Deli was still a French-leaning brunch place called Mimosa. But the pandemic shutdown inspired Hadidi to pursue his lifelong dream of opening a neighborhood deli. I happened to call him the week he closed for renovations. Because Mimosa had latkes on the menu, I figured the owner might be Jewish, and I was hoping to talk about Hanukkah food. (Hanukkah runs from Thursday, Dec. 11 to 18 this year.) After some friendly banter about whether or not Ashkenazi Jews even know how to cook, Hadidi invited me over to sample a multicourse holiday tasting.



Ajvar (left) and potato latkes at Marquez Deli, photos Luis Sánchez Saturno/*The New Mexican*

