

Cambridge's Latest Coffee Shop opens

"Wow, this is..." Noreen, a new Andala Café customer, paused, searching for the right words. "Beautiful," she finally blurts out. "Simply beautiful."

Overlooking Central Square, Andala's large glass windows beckon you into this unique café situated on the corner of Franklin and River Street in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Succumb to its call and you will be greeted with the pungent smell of coffee coupled with fresh pastries.

As you enter the café, the first thing you see is Sami Herbawi's, owner of Andala Café, short figure weaving among guests, checking in on the food, the drinks and the staff. His perceptive eyes catch every detail as he makes his rounds, adjusting chairs, tables and rugs. Sami's enthusiasm is contagious; infusing the café with energy.

"I wanted to do something unique," says Sami Herbawi, owner and manager of Andala Café. "I have been thinking of this place for years. Every piece of furniture in here comes from my attic."

And it must have been quite the attic. Andala Café pairs beautiful Middle Eastern antiques with small Parisian-style tables. Authentic Persian rugs cover the floors lending the café warmth and character. It's often difficult to find a seat as customers fill the nooks and crannies of the café; enjoying frothy espresso drinks, a wide variety of teas and signature pastries.

"I feel like it's my personal space," says Tom Stein, smiling sheepishly. "I come here when I need to get away from the office and just think."

Although Andala Café has existed in Sami's mind for quite some time, it is a recent addition to Central Square, opening in November 2006. When the previous restaurant closed, Sami put his long-standing dream into action. He completely re-decorated the space by installing high-end chandeliers, painting the walls light peach, refurbishing the wooden floors and adding unique decorations. For months, passers by saw the unique furniture, popped in and asked when he was going to open.

"It was great to build this momentum," says Sami, bobbing his head. "Everyone wanted to know when we would be open. I kept telling them to be patient."

Farrah Haidar
Writing Sample #1

Apparently, their patience paid off. The result of Sami's hard work is a decadently warm café that has proved popular among Central Square residents.

"I could sit here for hours," said Abdullah Daoud. "It's got everything I need – a plug for my laptop, coffee, good food and wireless internet access. Plus, it's just cozy."

Good food? True, but don't expect much variety. The food menu is currently limited to a few standing plates, one or two daily specials and pastries. "It will all change soon," Sami says. "We are going to install a brick oven for hot appetizers and pizza. We will also be adding fresh sandwiches, organic soups and salads to the menu. Everything will be made from scratch with the freshest organic ingredients."

The change in menu is just the beginning of Andala's evolution. During the summer, Sami will be adding tables on the sidewalk and serving hookah, the Middle Eastern water pipe, for customers who want to lounge and smoke. Sami is also eyeing the lower level as a great space for events and functions, as well as installing an espresso bar that serves beer and wine. For now, only the sidewalk space is confirmed.

"You have to love what you do," Sami comments. "People come here and they thank me for their drink, meal, whatever. I tell them it is me who should be thanking them – they let me do what I love."

And, with that, Sami shuffles off to take care of another loyal customer.