



Yemen Café

RESTAURANT

DISH:
Fahsa, Pita, and Toum

BY MICHAEL HIRSCH

I just ate the most depressing chicken caesar wrap of my life on a VIA Rail train from Montreal to Windsor.



It tasted like dust as the components folded into my mouth and became pulpy papier-mâché. Like literally, no discernable flavors. The concept of garlic, a whiff of bacon, the semi-acrid nothing of a flour tortilla processed to oblivion.

I'm shackled to the VIA Rail caesar wrap because I'm on my way back from a bachelor party; I went to bed at 4, woke up at 9, and now I'm on a train. Give Up by The Postal Service is not even coming close to hitting, time to switch to kora music played by Toumani Diabate. The bulging Quebecois man to my right is rummaging in the overhead compartments, an easy 6 or 7 hundred pounds teetering, teasing a topple. I've never seen someone more precarious.

The snowy trees rush past, miniature flurries reduce visibility. I'm heading back to Detroit, thank god.

Four countries, two months, constant movement, virtual torture. Zenmaxxing in the Colombian Amazon to gluttonmogging at Joe Beef in Montreal. There's nothing that I can't do.



I've barely been eating out in Detroit for a variety of reasons. Firstly, my absence from the city itself. I've been gone, we know that already. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, is the fact that I've been recovering from surgery and fled to Colombia during that process so my peers and potential mates wouldn't think I'm ugly.

The surgery itself wasn't so bad and 100% elective. Fourteen sticky and tense hours – mostly awake. Basically, I cashed in 17,000 Instagram followers for a hair transplant.

Hilarious.

Ya, I have to make Instagram content (which I am still in the process of editing). Ya my head got pricked over and over and over again, blood pouring down the sides of my head (presumably, I dunno I was on a jarring amount of Valium).

3000 holes punched, 3000 hairs extracted, 3000 new holes poked, and 3000 hairs placed. The future is looking bright and beautiful. Well, at least for my hairline.

Maybe I'm not gonna have any more "Meltdowns" – maybe a new hairline is all I need to optimize my personality...

Hot girls who wear angel wings on Halloween don't go for bald guys, they go for losers with hair. I know it's March, but I'm Jewish and Valentine's Day has passed, so Halloween is the next "hot people holiday" on my radar (after Memorial Day). I'm not sure if the Fourth of July counts, and Labor Day certainly doesn't; that is a party for the workers and nobody should be trying to look hot on that day.

Given my condition, I've been avoiding all typical haunts and happenings. Not for my vanity, but because I can use my vanity as an excuse to do what I really want to do, I travel around and do absolutely nothing. The bachelor party was my "big coming out party", of course, I was also happy to be there for my friend's marriage. But, this was also about me.



On Joseph Campau there's a restaurant we all know and love, with kinda-fluorescent lighting, murals of the mother country painted on the walls, zhug that can strip paint, toum that will ruin breath for the better part of a week...all perfectly delicious.

It's something of a hole-in-the-wall. Yemen Cafe is simply, a hole. I can slink in, amongst crowds of NGO-employed hipsters and old dudes who just got done praying, ready to cash out on some heavily spiced lamb; everybody too deep in their own world to pay attention to the temporary-uggo with the swollen head. I point at a booth, receive a thumbs-up from a broccoli headed waiter, and walk past two Juggalos whose scent somehow overpowers the spices emanating off the dishes.

A menu is dropped, attention is barely paid, quick smiles, dashes, and the inevitable "do you know what this stuff is" all happens in under 120 seconds and now I'm mulling over options, making decisions, and inspecting my fingernails. Fahsa, pita, and toum.

I ordered enough for an entire family and I will happily take leftovers. I really do need to watch portion control, but seriously, what am I supposed to do when this is my most economical option?





Fahsa dropped. Served in what I can only describe as a personal sized cauldron, warm lamb stew bubbling and percolating. Hawaji (containing cumin, black pepper, coriander, and cardamom), cloves and cinnamon are flashing all the olfactory alarms and letting me know this is some sort of holiday feast. I know, because I am not stupid, that I must wait to eat it. I see the bubbling. I very much feel the heat. But my stomach and my brain are not friends, so I rip pita, dip into stew, feel burn on my hand, feel burn on my tongue, experience flavor, then blister. I could've waited 5 minutes but that would only delay the pleasure I'm receiving in this moment. Something I'm not ready or willing to do.

The first time I had this meal I was 16 years old with my friends Sarah and Brooks. We'd be putzing around the abandoned Negro League baseball stadium taking film photos with flash in the middle of a snow storm. Wandering wandering for a couple hours in certainly below freezing conditions, mid-puberty hunger, same exact fahsa. When it arrived that night and every subsequent time I've ordered it, I burn the shit out of my mouth, and every time it is worth it.

I'm deeply satisfied and comforted by this. I'm not "into" reducing any ethnic dish—supposedly and romantically cooked by someone's mom—to comfort food solely because Philistines are too lazy to apprehend flavor. But to me, this is legitimate comfort food because it's been with me since I was a child and will continue being there til I die. Hopefully.

Yemen Cafe
8740 Joseph Campau Ave,
Hamtramck, MI 48212

