

Shop Talk
by Daryl Savage



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MACARTHUR PARK RENEWED

... Buy 30 citrus trees, remove carpeting and replace with hardwood floors, mix in hundreds of thousands of dollars of artwork from the original MacArthur Park in San Francisco (which closed last year), add one effervescent chef/owner, and you have a recipe for a new and improved restaurant. Although the name will remain, MacArthur Park at 27 University Ave. (on what used to be called "The Circle," by the Caltrain station) was recreated last month when it quietly changed hands. New owners **Faz Poursohi and Chuck Frank** closed the restaurant for a three-day renovation in late April. Workers quickly rehabbed, remodeled and redesigned the historic, WWI-era Julia Morgan building. "We've really cleaned it up. We're going to give this place the look and care it deserves," Poursohi said. He is also the chef, a native of Iran who learned cooking basics early in life at his uncle's restaurant in Tehran, and he is no stranger to MacArthur Park. He was the opening-day chef when the Palo Alto restaurant launched in 1981. Poursohi since has become well-known in the Bay Area and currently owns restaurants in Sunnyvale, Pleasanton and Danville — all called Faz. "I've always wanted to return back here and open a restaurant in Palo Alto," he said. Poursohi came to the United States in the 1970s to study engineering at the University of Illinois. To help with tuition, he began working for Lettuce Entertain You Enterprise, a popular restaurant group in Chicago. His culinary career came to life. "When you work in Chicago, you become very good at meat and potatoes," he said. And ribs. Ribs became a specialty of his — he won fourth place in a national contest for barbecued ribs. "I've raised the bar on cooking ribs. I take it very seriously. I order my ribs from Chicago," Poursohi said, noting he cooks about 60 pounds of ribs a day at MacArthur Park. He predicts that number will triple in the next few months. "We want to make sure we have the best ribs in town," he said. The key to his popularity? "Going organic whenever possible and keeping it simple." The building that houses the restaurant once was a social center for servicemen stationed at the old Camp Fremont in Menlo Park during World War I, designed by famed regional architect Julia Morgan. It was later moved to Palo Alto and for years was known as the Veterans Building, where it housed veterans' organizations and their pancake breakfasts.