

NEW YORK

1

Druckman and Gershenson Visit Mansoura in Gravesend

by [Eater Staff](#) | Mar 25, 2014, 10:20am EDT

In each installment of Pastry Cases, sweets fanatics and lovers of (most) things baked [Charlotte Druckman](#) and [Gabriella Gershenson](#) (AKA the [@pastrycases](#)) share a favorite pastry, chocolate, ice cream scoop, or other delectable delight worth the sugar high—and the trek. In this week's edition, the intrepid insulin junkies go to [Mansoura](#), a mom-and-pop Syrian bakery in Gravesend, Brooklyn, that makes the best baklava in the borough, and possibly, all the land.



[Mansoura Pastries in Gravesend, Brooklyn. [All photos by Paul Crispin Quitoriano](#)]

Charlotte Druckman: So, you made me go all the way out to Gravesend.

Gabriella Gershenson: I did! This is kind of the perfect Brooklyn bakery, but it has nothing to do with "Brooklyn," the brand.

CD: This is the real thing, is what you're saying.

GG: Yes. Mansoura is the holy grail: Amazing craft and heritage in their pastry, with none of the pretension. This is a family run business that specializes in **Syrian pastries**—Syrian Jewish if you count the fact that the owners are Jewish, and the place is kosher. (Which is why we went on a Sunday. They're not even open on Saturdays.)



[A tray of knafeh, aka kataifi, at Mansoura Pastries in Gravesend, Brooklyn]

CD: I didn't know a lot about Syrian pastry. I was a little worried that there would be a lot of **Turkish Delight** and rosewater.

GG: You weren't entirely wrong.

CD: But there were so many pleasant surprises in store! The first thing I noticed when we walked in was that the woman behind the counter, Josiane, the mother, was speaking FRENCH.



[A tray of baklava.]

GG: She's from Morocco, but her husband's family has been peddling these pastries for more than 300 years—in Aleppo, in Cairo, in Paris, and now in Brooklyn.

CD: The first thing we tried was one of the things you'd told me about beforehand, the **apricot roll**. What surprised me, and this was true of everything, is how few ingredients are in each item but then how good and how different and deep the flavor in each is. I also loved the pistachio brittle-ish thing, the **candied pistachios**—

GG: —with rose water, it's like chewy pavement made out of roasted nuts.



[Pastry tins; Apricot rolls chock full of Turkish pistachios]

CD: Yes, a judicious amount of rosewater. And what was that other pastry whose name I keep botching? Because it has a different name in Turkey and in Egypt and in Syria?

GG: Knafeh. Or **kataifi**. The one that's like shredded wheat.



[Candied hazelnuts (left) and pistachios.]

CD: It is just like shredded wheat but lighter on the tongue, and more crispy than crunchy. And with the nuts on the inside you get a contrasting softness. What amazed me as much as the pastry itself is that **Jack**, the youngest son, had grown up with the pastry being machine-made, and got it in his head just a few years ago that if they did it by hand it would be better. Usually, this goes the other way.



[Jack Mansoura makes pistachio confections.]

GG: Doesn't he show how it's done on [Mansoura's Instagram](#)?

CD: Yes! Their Instagram is worth following.

GG: But the major reason why I brought you here is that when I tasted their [baklava](#), it made me realize that this is what baklava is supposed to be. I didn't know it because someone told me—I just knew it the way you know when something is just right. And they buy their pistachios from Turkey, which is not cheap.



[Candied pistachios (left) and pistachio baklava.]

CD: Oh the baklava! I still can't get over when Jack told us it's SUPPOSED to be crispy but no one knows this, because no one knows how to make it crispy. So now all these imbeciles (I was one of them) have come to believe baklava is soggy. That's really sad...You said that the texture reminded you of feuilletine—

GG: —that crispy French wafer that shatters between your teeth and disappears, yes. Their baklava has 70 layers of phyllo dough (!!!).

CD: It's like you can feel each layer in your mouth as it crunches and it's the nuts that give you the mushy (in a good way!) texture that contrasts against the pastry leaves...

GG: Tender.



[There are 70 layers of pastry in Mansoura's baklava (pictured with serving spatula).]

CD: And meaty, almost. You get such a rush of pistachio flavor.

GG: You had an awakening!

CD: To the point where I want it again, and I think everyone should try that baklava and use it as a standard going forward.



[Pistachio candy being made.]

GG: I totally agree, I haven't had a better one anywhere.

CD: I wish we had only a slice of that, and then left, because we ate too much.

GG: It's the kind of pastry that you only need a tiny piece of precisely because it is so powerful, and potent, and sweet.

CD: TOO MUCH SUGAR. But it was all so good.



[An assortment, from left: baklava, pistachio knafeh, Turkish delight, candied pistachios, apricot roll and almond nougat.]

GG: You broke out in hives. I was worried.

CD: But we were in good hands! You were giving them so much good advice you've already got them working **Smorgasburg** in your mind. They would kill at Smorgasburg.

GG: The problem is, there's hipster Brooklyn and the rest of Brooklyn. That is the tale of two cities in our little world.



[Matriarch Josiane Mansoura.]

CD: Right, but hipster Brooklyn perks up if you say "handmade" and if you tell a story and present something that has even a whiff of "authenticity," and these folks have all that in spades.

GG: And what they do, sorry, is so much more authentic than so many of the dilettantes making artisanal caramels and pop tarts. They're so out of the league of hipster Brooklyn, it's actually embarrassing. I am embarrassed that Brooklynites celebrate poseurs and are not hoisting the Mansouras on their shoulders.



[Josiane Mansoura watches her sons, David (left) and Jack make candied pistachios.]

CD: I know! Even the **chocolate-covered almond candy** was better than so much of the beautifully packaged chocolate you see Made in Brooklyn. Let me be honest. I would be more open to giving Hipster Brooklyn my vote if it embraced the Mansouras and spent some time visiting the Brooklyn that they've invaded.

GG: If they're really lazy, they can order from **Mansoura online**, though I recommend going to the store because it is the culmination of centuries of craft, and love.



[Almond croquant.]

CD: I have so much respect for them. What happens when they die out? How do you keep the business alive without changing what's so wonderful about it?

GG: I am munching on the **walnut baklava** right now. Man, these are so sticky you need a wet paper towel to properly clean your fingers. Mansoura pastries should come with wet naps. Don't change Mansoura. Just pack wet naps. But please don't change.

Mansoura, 515 Kings Hwy, Brooklyn, NY. Order online at mansoura.com.

