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NEW YORK



**Laila Gohar Just Wants Dinner to Be Easy**

**“After eating weird shit all day, I really need simple food that isn’t messed with.”**

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By Chris Crowley



Photo: Erinn Springer

Laila Gohar creates art and interactive installations using all kinds of ingredients — for an exhibit called “Comfort,” Gohar and fellow artist Sam Stewart baked bread into the form of an edible La-Z-Boy recliner — and in her personal life, she’s famous for her dinner parties. As she once said, “If I have one skill it’s that I can throw a really great party.” One of her secrets: Don’t overthink things. This week, she poached sole in milk for visiting friends, made several kinds of beans, and

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popped by her regular haunt, Café Altro Paradiso. Read all about it in this week's Grub Street Diet.

## Thursday, February 6

I woke up at 7:15 and asked my husband to make me coffee while I'm still in bed. I always need to beg. He never just does it right away. Anyway, I have a coffee with cream. No breakfast. I'm never hungry in the mornings.

All day I graze at my studio. I don't really have meals unless I'm with people. It's just because of the nature of my work. Because I'm around food all over the time when I'm working, I'm constantly tasting and trying different things so I don't eat real meals. You kind of just don't want it alone, the whole ritual is sitting down, and I never really have a chance to get hungry.

I drank some more coffee throughout the day and grazed on the following: cashews, almonds, three different varieties of white beans, a smoked scallop, four different seaweeds, handfuls of arugula, some baking chocolate, a spoon of parsnip purée, dandelion, fried capers, and garlic confit.

I had done this event the day before and was working on another, so I was testing different things. The above combination sounds gross together, but is typical of how I eat. You asked for it, sorry. These were all things I was working with — I think about both what I like to eat and the visual aspect; it's not only one or the other.

After the studio, I went home and made dinner for myself and my husband. A friend was in town visiting from London, and that was the only day I could see him, and a few other friends came over. We have people over several times a week and it's very casual. Our friends know that at our house there is always a plate of food if you need one. My friend Ignacio stopped late too, after he finished work. We eat dinner together often.

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After eating weird shit all day, I really need simple food that isn't messed with. We had Castelluccio lentils that I boiled with olive oil, sole poached in milk, greens that I blanched and then sautéed with olive oil and garlic, salt boiled potatoes and aioli. The potatoes were from this really great potato farmer at Union Square. They basically only have potatoes.

I have a macchiato after dinner, always, even if it's late. I just like it. Because the milk is a little bit sweet, but I don't like it to be milky. I don't like a cortado or a cappuccino. I would never drink that after food, but macchiato has just a little cream and the dairy is a little sweet, you know?

## Friday, January 7

Breakfast was a black coffee. Then it was off to work.

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We stopped to have family meal at work, which was nice. This is something I do sometimes, with the people who work for me. We had beans and leftover turnip greens which we made into a stew. I ate that with yogurt. I grew up eating lots of savory dishes with yogurt and still do it. It was raining and cold so this felt good.

It's not that I'm nostalgic. I don't carry that with me. My mom was a really bad cook and I think part of the reason I liked to cook was that I didn't like what she served us. My dad is a really good and sort of inventive cook in a good way. I definitely think in my family there was a strong food culture. It was important to sit around the table, we ate everything, but just in terms of my mom's skill they were pretty poor.

After work, I stopped by the Essex Market to pick up some things for a soup dinner party I'm making at my friend Kim's house on Saturday. Beef bones for stock. I had a coffee from Porto Rico and some miso soup from Ni Japanese Delicacies.

For dinner, I went to meet some friends at Ignacio's restaurant, Café Altro Paradiso. I eat here maybe three times a week on average. Everyone there is family and it's the kind of food I want to eat everyday. I basically don't go to any other restaurant. Altro or my house. That's it. A lot of restaurants in New York I find really loud and uncomfortable. I just like it there.

I pretty much like everything on the menu. I guess that's why I go there all the time. That day there was a new dish, roasted pepper and anchovy. I really liked that. But I've had pretty much everything a million times. I love the tiramisu. It's delicious. I also really like the panna cotta. And all the ice creams.

We basically had everything on the menu. The wine was great too. I ran into so many friends. Altro feels like going home. I was drunk, full, and happy, and needed to go to my other home.

## **Saturday, February 8**

No breakfast. Two coffees.

This was the day of the soup party. Kim has these soup parties once a year and they're really fun. I've been going to these for a few years. Usually she makes all the soup, but this year she asked a few friends to contribute. She's a good cook and made her famous mushroom soup. David Tannis made a pozole, Ignacio a green minestrone, and Danny Bowien a pumpkin congee.

I made some stock with the bones I bought on Friday, and I then used that to make a Turkish red lentil and bulgur soup. It's just something I like to eat. I didn't really spend much time thinking about it. Some things just come naturally. I'm more obsessive about my work, less about the fun stuff, you know?

I also went to the farmers market early and got some more stuff before actually making the soup. After the market, Ignacio came over and we made our soups together. We had a little makeshift

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lunch of leftover lentils; a salad with Shepherd's purse, this delicious green I found at Lanis farm at the market; and Halloumi cheese.

When our soups were ready, we took them over to Kim's in the afternoon. The party started, the soups were a hit. After a few hours at the party, I was hungry and needed solid food (no more soup) so we went to Lucky Strike. It was 2 a.m., we ordered burgers and a steak frites.

After I went home and was still snacking because I didn't like the steak. I ate my weight in pine nuts. I love pine nuts. It's just so crazy that this thing comes from a tree and tastes the way it does. They're their own thing.

## **Sunday, January 9**

I woke up later than usual and felt hungry. I had some smoked trout in the fridge, watercress, and aioli left over from the other night. So I threw that together and made a sandwich.

Later on, I made a watercress salad and ate some nuts. There was also smoked duck in the fridge so I had a few bites of that. I bought it from the duck guy at the Union Square Farmers Market.

At night, I went to a fashion dinner — New York Fashion Week had started, so there's a lot of different things happening — and had a piece of dry sea bass. I just had a bite to be polite.

Socially, I get kind of exhausted so I don't really go to much, but I work a lot. Because of that, I just don't want to spend so much time thinking about what kind of coffee I am drinking in the morning, or whatever, or what restaurants to go to. I just want that to come more naturally. I want that to come a little easy.

I just want simple things at the end of the day, because I spend all of my time thinking about stuff like this, so when I get home I want to eat food that tastes like the ingredient, not something that's been totally transformed.